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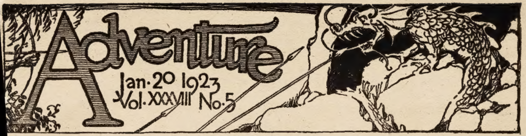

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Headings . . . . **George M. Richards**

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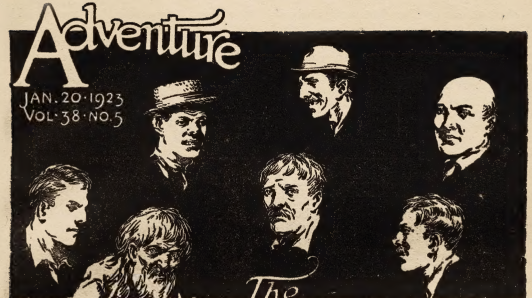
GREED, masquerading as love of the *Vaterland*, caused the murder, in the most inaccessible region of Uganda, of an American doctor who discovered the cure for sleeping sickness. Dr. Fraser Kirkton and his guide set out from New York to seek the doctor's camp in the hope that a clue might be found there explaining the nature of the cure. Against them are arrayed not only malignant forces of the tropical jungle but the emissaries of foreign powers hostile to their purpose. "THE LOST CURE," a novel by Charles Beadle, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

**Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—
the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



A Complete Novelette

The SEVEN SUSPECTED

by ELEANOR GATES and FREDERICK MOORE

TO THE little crescent-shaped island of Raragona, the news came first as a whisper.

That whisper traveled from the western tip of the half-moon of mountainous land, where stood the thatched hut which was store and drinking-place combined, to the eastern tip, which was the limit of the run-down copra plantation; from the dazzling white beach, which curved in toward the north, it was carried up—over a steep, narrow trail that twisted from side to side across the stony bed of a rivulet banked brilliantly with green—to the great bungalow, with walls of plaited bamboo, which, perched on a high bench under the bare, precipitous, iron-black brow of the dead volcano, was known as "the millionaire's club." It stole past the pink-and-white box that was the church built out of coral blocks, and on through the dense-growing, mountainward-sloping coconuts, and the pandanus, breadfruit, and fern trees, the interlaced orchids and vines and creepers, to a low tent roofed with tin. It flashed along the bending edge of the placid lagoon to the squaw-man's shack in the strung-out native village.

The whisper was this—

"The coast-guard cutter *Quiapo* is coming from Zamboanga in five days to take away a white man who's wanted for murder."

Of the four hundred and odd inhabitants of the verdant dot, which, pricking the deeps of the Celebes Sea, lay so utterly to itself, eastward of the Caroline Group, only nine were white. And these nine did not question where the whisper had started, or how. Could it have come in any other way than by the schooner *Tropic Express*—just gone from her deep, islet-encircled anchorage through a gap between the western end of Raragona and a sliver of palm-crested reef, leaving bare the motionless blue of a harbor perfectly oval?

But even the palm-tops, as they swung languidly in the gentle monsoon, seemed to be spreading the news in a hushing chorus, the leaves of the forest tonguing it, the water of the lagoon lapping and lipping it; while from beyond the four scraps of land forming the atoll, there came the beat of the surf, like a deep, solemn mournful accusation.

From the hour that the news became general, the whole island underwent a change—a change not only in the way that the natives as well as the white people

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looked at one another, but particularly in the way all those who could not be suspected regarded the few who could. Where before had been something less than complete indifference, now in every glance there was a keen, searching question.

Also, the seductive peace and restfulness of Raragona suddenly gave place to excitement and curiosity. What added to these was the fact that the rumor was so indefinite, so incomplete. Every one felt the strain. It was in the very air. It filled the stillness of the hot day hours. It made palpitant the starlit vastness of the night.

The island not only whispered, but it listened. And it began to watch seaward—through that gap by which must enter the man-hunting government cutter.

In five days, lightning would strike!

Whom?

It could not strike any one of the nine. For of those nine, two were beyond suspicion: The first, a woman, the frail, pale girl-wife of the young planter, French; the second, Padre Araneta, tall, slender, olive-skinned, who gave himself relentlessly to his work of caring for and guiding the natives, and whose face, with its soft, dark eyes, was as grave as if he were bearing all the burdens and sorrows of his little world.

It was from among seven that one was to go. And these seven were "Snubby," who kept the store; French, the lessee of the plantation; "Liverpool," the cockney married to old Fula-lua's brown daughter, Lizzie; aged Charlie Miller, who lived in the tin-can house; and the trio at the "club" on the mountainside—Heathcote, Brewer, and Welcome.

An uptilted and startlingly short nose, which looked as if it had been driven back against the face by a blow, and had never resumed its former position, gave Snubby his nickname. He was in his late twenties, full-chested, of good height and solidly built. His eyes were yellow and bold, his ears, set too high in tightly curling blond hair, were over-large, and "cabbaged," so that they were like some sort of a peculiarly defective growth on either side of his big, round head.

Below his scanty brows his skin was pasty, and as rough as that of a plucked chicken. But in sharp contrast to the lower two-thirds of a countenance still boyish, his forehead was sliced horizontally with deep wrinkles such as might belong to a man three times his age—wrinkles that gave him a half-puzzled, half-dissatisfied expression. Large, strong teeth which, at the left side, heaped themselves upon one another, slightly lifted and parted his mouth, giving it the effect of a constant sneer—even when he smiled. And he possessed that curious gift of being able to talk out of that lifted side without moving his heavy and always clean-shaven lips.

He was light on a pair of big feet covered with low, white shoes that were as snub-nosed as himself, walking swiftly and with something of the ease of a dancer. He wore shirts that had no collars, and affected tight-fitting trousers with narrow stripes. His manner was domineering and fearlessly brassy. The way his stiff, narrow-brimmed straw hat was set on his head gave him an impudent, belligerent air, for he wore it tilted slightly to one side. Age and exposure to the elements had darkened this headpiece. For indoors and out he wore it constantly.

About Snubby's age, but in sharp contrast to the storekeeper, was Liverpool, whose long, narrow face had that pinched, too-old look which betrays an undernourished childhood. His greasy hair was spare and graying, and was worn with a Napoleonic wisp down a receding forehead. When he talked he had the habit of closing his small, deep-set eyes, which were set too close to a sharp, Roman nose, that appeared to be all but transparent. His skinny neck, which was no larger round than one bone of a wrist added to another, was equipped with a comically large and active Adam's apple.

His loose-jointed body was thin and flat, so that he seemed taller than he was. In a pair of loose denim breeches, a ship-steward's frogged white jacket, a battered gray bowler, and down-at-the-heel shoes into which were thrust bare feet, he made an unkempt appearance. Yet about him there was the jauntiness and sailorish swing of a man accustomed to carrying a pyramid of dishes, and serving food in a pitching steamer's saloon. He was the fawning, agreeing type, greedily wishful of fair words and good treatment. To court these, an ingratiating grin persistently showed a wide, toothless gap in his bristly upper jaw.

In old blue overalls and a gingham shirt, French was a gangley, slouching, hang-dog figure of a man, with big stooped shoulders, and long, muscular arms which hung limply down his body, the calloused fingers almost touching his knees. His ash-blond hair was ragged from being cut by the inexperienced hand of his wife. Here and there it showed white spots that were the bare scalp. His drooping moustache screened a drooping mouth. In his tanned face were set blue eyes, kindly, but pathetically discouraged.

The eldest of the three on the mountain was Welcome, a thick-set, big-legged man of about fifty, sunburned to a bright, angry red over his full, smooth face, polished, bald poll, and thick neck. Even the hair fringing his ears and the back of his head had been somewhat bleached by the sun. Fair and fine as that of a baby, it was just beginning to show threads paler than blond. His eyes were prominent and light-blue.

He looked to be what he said he was—an oil-operator who, having made a clean-up, had retired to seek a climate good for his asthma. On Raragona, the asthma did not trouble him. Neither did the lack of civilization. He took life easy, enjoyed his food and his tobacco, slept long hours, and left the bungalow rarely, and then only if he felt a desire to fish.

Brewer was half Welcome's age—a burly, country-bred young man with abundant wet-combed, bright red hair and a small, stiff, red mustache. His eyes were large and smiling and hazel. His face, shoulders and arms were plentifully sprinkled with freckles. He spoke of himself as a globe-trotter; and explained his two years on an island so completely off the beaten track of the tourist by saying that he wanted to be where he could drink without shaming his relatives.

Behind the bungalow, in the bottom of a deep, volcanic blow-hole, he kept some pet turtles. Likewise, he amused himself by tinkering in a kitchen garden that lay between the house and the cook-shack. He raised green onions that, eaten by Welcome, sealed the latter's full eyes the tighter, and prolonged his sound sleep; also, he grew parsley and chives, which Yang-lama, the native cook, chopped fine before making a green dust of them on the scrambled eggs of fighting-chickens.

Heathcote was a trifle older than Brewer, taller and more slender. His clear skin was so tanned that his dark-blue eyes seemed a startlingly vivid blue. His smile was ready and engaging, his hair, thick, and parted well down along one side of a head noticeably well-proportioned. His clean-shaven features were firm, yet sensitive, in their cut.

He was always careful of his dress. His white shirt was tied under its unstarched collar with a loosely knotted black tie. His white duck trousers, tailored on the China Coast, were belted with a strip of stout native fabric. His white shoes were kept scrupulously clean by young Yang-lama, the Malay cook and general servant. And the angle at which he wore a straw hat with a soft brim, and the undeniable air with which his clothes hung on him, made of him—against his tropic background of fuzzy palms, green seas, and cobalt skies—a striking and romantic figure.

Every schooner that came to anchor in the lagoon a second time brought him books, papers and magazines. Much that he read had to do with painting, and he worked long hours at his easel. In a year or two, when he could paint a canvas worth carrying away with him, he meant to go to Borneo, or perhaps to Java, and really do something.

Last of the seven, and strangest of all, was aged, white-haired, white-bearded, bent-backed Charlie Miller, who claimed to be one hundred, and looked it. His face was so lined and dried and blackened by the sun that it seemed like the face of a head that had been hung and smoked—a dead face, in which only the cunning, lashless, watery eyes were alive. Though when he muttered, his toothless mouth opened and puckered like some worn-out, brown suede purse.

He was called "Old Wreck" Miller. His clothes were rags. He went unwashed in a retreat fairly engulfed by water. Why he had come to Raragona, no one knew. He had lived so long on the island that only a few of French's natives could remember when he first came. He had taken to the jungle then, not walking upright even that many years ago, but in a stooping position, his back parallel with the ground, his right arm swinging down to it, the other pulling behind him a section of wood which was topped by a bushy growth. And as he scuttled along, carefully and painstakingly, with that dragging brush, he erased any prints of his naked feet.

Though Raragona was remote and tiny, its white population did not form a tight-knitted little corporation, recognizing common interests, and the bond of color; quite the contrary. Socially, it cut itself up into several divisions, of which the trio on the dead volcano's slope was one, French and his wife another, Snubby and Liverpool a third. Mentally deficient old Charlie Miller did not count anywhere, while the *padre* belonged to all, being the sole outward and visible link between the others and their God.

So the nine outlanders did not come together to talk over that rumor. Instead, these several divisions drew farther apart, if anything, and saw quite as little as possible of one another.

WHEN the sails of the *Tropic Express* were like a gray gull in flight through the low mist resting upon the sea, Snubby broached the subject to Liverpool across the bar he was rubbing dry.

"Them sea-goin' bulls on the *Quiapo* has always looked to me," he declared importantly, "t' keep Raragona clear of bums and crooks. And so far that's what I've done—" then with cool impudence—"barrin' turnin' you over to 'em for a loafer that's gone native."

Liverpool writhed ingratiatingly, showing that gummy gap in a grin, but fastening upon the other ferret eyes that belied the smile.

"You're a good sort, old chum," he protested. "Allus 'avin' yer little joke. But the kindest 'eart——"

"Listen, mush-face," broke in the storekeeper. "When it comes to law and order, I don't let my heart run nothin'. I've got the only place o' business on this island. So it's up t' me t' see that Raragona keeps respectable. Ain't I turned in more'n a dozen o' ship deserters in my day?"

"An' the clever way y' done it!" marveled the cockney. "Tellin' each one t' 'ide 'ere, that it was syfe, and all that, w'ich made it easy for the cutter bobbies t' nab 'em."

"What's the use," argued Snubby righteously, "of havin' a loafer take to the mountain, and have to be hunted through miles o' jungle as thick-set as my hair? And put the officers t' all that trouble? No. But! Here's one little time I fell down. Fell down flat! And what'll they say t' me!"

Liverpool looked bland concern.

"'Ow've y' fell down flat?" he inquired. "I cawn't believe that, I cawn't. I've traveled a good bit, bein' pantryman's-'elper on steamers to ev'ry port. And I ayn't never seen a smarter chap'n you."

"I s'pose I take that stuff like it was a compliment, eh?" demanded Snubby. "Well, I don't, for the good and simple reason that you miss bein' a human, and what you think don't count a half o' one. Why, you're the scrapin's of a ship's sink, you are—and the sink of the fo'csle cook at that! You was born a bum and never got over it. You, with that tar-faced girl o' your'n, you'd be dirt under the feet of the low-downdest pot-walloper in a coal-barge."

He swept his bar towel in graceful circles.

Liverpool accepted this as light badinage.

"'Ow 'ave y' fell flat?" he persisted, his small eyes still boring Snubby. "I don't like t' 'ear o' things goin' wrong with yer. Wot's 'appened?"

"I ain't been wise to the fact that there's a murderer on Raragona. I ain't turned him in. That's what's happened."

Liverpool's under jaw slowly lifted, closing his lips. He swallowed, raising and dropping his Adam's apple. Then?—

"Oh, that," he commented. "But 'ow could y' turn 'im in if y' didn't know there was one, or 'oo it was?"

Snubby grimaced.

"Ra-a-ats!" he returned loftily. "There's always one on every out-of-the-way island. Sure! And I know who it is, all right, all right!"

"Y' do?"

Liverpool's long neck stretched forward eagerly. Then with enthusiasm:

"Y're a wonderful smart 'un, y' are! I was certain y'd be knowin' 'oo it might be just as soon as ever I 'eard the yarn the *Quiapo* 'd be comin'. I've made up *my* mind, too. Maybe I'm mistaken abawt it, most likely. You're the chap 'ood 'ave it correct, old chum, and I'm bettin' on you."

Snubby laughed boisterously.

"I'll say I am!" he retorted. "But! It ain't a hard thing t' be right about this proposition, for the simple reason that there's jus' one man on Raragona that's all wrong."

"Ha? Ha?" urged Liverpool, his thin lips wide apart again, as if this were something that he would be able, dog-like, to catch.

Snubby stopped his polishing and leaned far across his bar.

"French!" he whispered.

Liverpool heard the pronouncement with a jerk of the head that threatened to snap his thin neck.

"French?"

"Had my suspicions about him this long time. Ever notice how he keeps away from the beach when a trader's in? His *serang* comes down, and the captain goes up. That's how business is done. Leary, that's what that outfit is. Don't want t' be looked over by too many. Both the Frenches is like that. Oh, I'm on t' 'em, I am!"

Now Liverpool nodded.

"I'm leary of 'im, too," he admitted confidentially. "And I say! Ever noticed the look in 'is eyes? That chap, 'e'd kill as soft as 'e'd pick a mango!"

"You said it! It's him. O'course, them three up the creek is too fancy to be on the level, but they all git letters, which is a sign they're not specially hiding out here. The Frenches, they don't never. Mister High-Toned Heathcote, he's one of them nut sketcher-fellers, and he'd faint if he was to see a stiff, much less pull a gat on a man. Brewer's a real gent. He ain't afraid t' spend his dough, you bet! He's my best gin customer! Welcome's a pretty fair guy, also, but too fat to be dangerous. He's too soft to croak a guy—honest, he reminds me of a bull-pup with the heart-burn!"

The big room, with its ceiling of old canvas laced to the round bamboo rafters with halyard line, and its sanded floor, spotted here and there with chairs that were grouped in friendly fashion about little tables, now rang with the full throated laughter of the two.

"Aw, y're a great card!" Liverpool complimented, when he could find his voice. "Funny as a music-'all actor-man, y' are! W'y, y' could myke a fine livin' on the styge, y' could. Talent is wot y've got! That's it! Talent fit for a pantomime! Y're full of it!"

Snubby sobered at the flattery.

"You ain't no fool," he retorted. "And if it's you the cutter's comin' for, just you tip me the wink when she shows up, and I'll put you in one of my beer vats—just a can or two in the bottom of it, and I'll let 'em see me draw from that one, and who'll look in it?"

"Har! har!" guffawed Liverpool. "Wot a scheme! I s'y, you Yankees beat the Dutch! Maybe if y' put it up to French, and he wants to 'ide, he'll pay a good bit for the chance to fool the cutter's bobbies."

"That lazy, shiftless, stingy-gut! Raragona could be prosp'rous if that double-jointed jackass had any git up and git! When's that hookworm-kid ever spent a dollar in my place? By thunder, not since the night of the big wind! There's that coconut grove of his, which has made at least four men good and rich. But for all French's been here several years now, he's let things go t' the —— so fast he don't make more'n a fair livin'. When d' we git any traders? Not once in a blue moon, and we never have any blue moons around here!"

" 'E 'ates me good and proper. An' I don't much blyme 'im, long's I've advised the village on all matters ap-pertyenin' t' honest wyges."

"Yeah. But y' better be careful t' jus' keep shut t' the natives about *my* prices! Don't forgit that—or I'll knock the last tooth you got down your giraffe neck!"

"Right you are, old chum! Not me! Ayn't you me pal?"

"I've lost my respect to that extent, limey."

"Well, twig it! Blood is thicker than warter, old chum! I'm English, and 'appy to s'y that in all my time out in these flamin' latitoods, I ain't lost my accent. But with French, it's my plyn duty, as a member of the nytive communerty, t' pertect 'em, bein's I'm wed up with a wife 'oo's got royal blood in her veins."

"Aw cut it!" said Snubby disgustedly. "Every squaw-man pulls that chief's daughter stuff! And that reminds me, Liverpool. Tell your relations-in-law, and the balance of the mongrels in Stringtown, that I got a swell shipment by the *Tropic Express*—tin stuff, calico, some birds of jack-knives, a lot of mosquito nettin', some smelly cologne water for the native beauties, and candy for the kids. And say! You look a bit down in the mouth, old snake-eye! Have a swaller of gin before y' go!"

"Thank you kindly, Snubby, sir. I won't mind a sup or two afore I push on 'ome. Sorter picks me up when I'm lonesome and dream in my sleep o' Vaux'all Road and its thousands o' pubs lit up of a foggy night. But after I've 'ad my swaller I'd myke so bold as to awsk for a couple o' cloves t' suck—so my brownie missus won't give me the sharp for lushin' it."

Snubby pushed a big green bottle across the bar and laughed derisively.

"Oh, you poor fish! Down here in the South Seas, and you're lettin' a woman run y'!"

Liverpool was too busy at the moment with his peg of gin to reply, but when he had made a grimace of satisfaction and had smacked his lips he lifted an admonitory hand to Snubby, and with great solemnity, remarked:

"That's toppin' gin. Britons never shall be slyves—and I'm boss o' the roost, for all my old lydy's gab. Got to be goin' as I promised my kids I'd be back and give 'em a tune."

And with a respectful farewell glance at the gin-bottle, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and departed.

IN THAT same hour of that first day of the fateful five, the rumor was the sole topic in the village of brown people—a village consisting of a single mile-long line of steep-roofed, lagoon-facing houses which, from the *padre's* diminutive, one-roomed bungalow to the shacks that sheltered the house-help of the plantation, curved as the beach curved, and split the big palm-grove of the flats in half. Due to the efforts of the *padre*, who was architect and physician, as well as teacher and spiritual guide, the houses were unique in all the seas about. Their high roofs were of the long used pandanus thatch. But their walls and floors were of coralline, thick, clean, heat-defying.

The morning swelter was on. The natives lay on their mats, men and women alike enjoying their pipes and cigarets. They were a mixture of various tribes from Borneo and the Sulu groups. Polynesians from the near-by Carolines had added to them an extra strain. And, betrayed by the slanting of their shining black eyes, there was in them considerable Chinese blood.

They were larger bodied than pure Malays, but slender, muscular, and a light golden-brown. They had on sarongs, or generous breadths of trade-cloth, worn in modest wrappings. They were a good-natured, tractable, gay and friendly lot. And as they idled away the time till a wind should spring up, they looked out through the pillars of the palms to where the children were playing in the shade about the overturned canoes and, voices lowered with awe and regret, asked one another what white man of that seven was to be carried away to his death.

On the bare, ramshackle veranda of the French bungalow, the subject had not yet been broached. The furniture of the porch, which was hung with torn and dusty netting, consisted of a bench made from a kerosene-can case, and a hammock constructed of barrel staves and gunny sacking. Mrs. French was stretched in the hammock—in a soiled wrapper so old that it was a combination of several, one pattern overlapping another.

Her husband was close by, his back swaying the *swale* wall against which he leaned, his boots on the railing. He was watching the sea moodily. Every now and again he took down his long legs as if he were about to leave, but ended by shuffling his feet uneasily.

"I was told something yesterday," he remarked presently.

His tone was significant. The hammock had been swinging slightly. It came to an instant stop. Startled, the young wife raised herself on an elbow and stared at him, frightened.

"What?"

As she moved, her shoulders and knees showed as sharp points through the patched calico. Her head was small, her features were delicate. In the drawn and sallow skin of her oval face her eyes looked overlarge, and sickly. Her lifeless brown hair was pinned straight back, and hung in strings against the back of a throat through which there seemed to course no blood.

French twisted his head about to give a cautious glance into the room at his back.

"You haven't been saying a word to anybody about—us?" he demanded, a worried expression in his eyes. "Have you, Belle? Where we came from, or—or why we're here?

"Jeff!"

She lifted herself out of the hammock and stood beside it, her stockingless feet in native slippers that had no heels. Now, even with her wrapper hanging about her, she had the look of a creature whose ribs showed. She began to tremble.

"Why, no! What makes you ask me such a thing! I haven't seen anybody but the help. Jeff! Jeff!"

"Don't be scared, Belle." His discouraged eyes tried to smile at her kindly. "I've got to tell you. I don't want to. It may be nothing, you understand. Then again, it may be a lot. Anyhow, we won't let it stir us up."

"Go on and tell me!" she pleaded. "What's gone wrong?"

"The Government's cutter's coming down here to take somebody away—a white man."

Slowly she backed into the hammock, and sat.

"Coming to take somebody," she repeated. And sat staring at the shaking hands in her lap.

"One man. We've got six chances out of seven that we're all right. So don't worry, Belle, more than you can help. We'll know in about five days."

He lighted a cigar.

She drew in her breath sharply.

"Can't you find out who it is? What's the man done they're coming for?"

"All I've got is a word that the skipper of the *Express* dropped to me. I suspected he was trying me out—to see if I'd be scared. So I pretended it didn't interest me. Thought that was the safest way for me to act under the circumstances. And he didn't say whether it was a case of stealing—or killing."

"Ah!" It was a groan. "Maybe the world's a littler place than we thought, after all, Jeff. Maybe——"

Smoke rose about his head in graceful curls.

"I don't intend to let this business panic me," he said stoutly. "And don't you. We won't bat an eye, Belle—we won't give one inch. We'll hope for the best, kid, and we'll stand our ground!"

"Yes."

She turned her flat little body, dropped sidewise into the swagging hammock, covered her face with her hands, and began to weep softly.

"It's that crack-brained Charlie Miller, most likely," French went on reassuringly. "That's why he drags that branch behind him. If it isn't Old Wreck, it might be Snubby, or that dark young fellow from the mountain who paints such bum pictures. I've never believed he's a painter any more than I am myself. Whoever it is, it won't be long before we know, so don't feel bad, Belle. Remember, we've got to keep a grip on our nerve."

"I won't cry again," she sobbed. "Only now. It'll help me if I can cry it out. Jeff! Jeff!"

"Makes me think of things mother used to read to me in the Bible," he told her. "Ever think what a lot there is in the Bible that's intended for folks that've gone to the left? 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap,' and 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth.' Worst of all, there's the saying, 'Thy sins shall find thee out.' The world's full of poor, weak, sinning men. And may be for just that reason I won't be the one man that's wanted out of Raragona's seven."

"They're not coming for Charlie Miller," she declared, "no matter what he's ever done. Why, he isn't a human being, Jeff. He's kind of a twisted old animal—a half-baboon."

"If what you say is true, then that leaves me one chance out of six."

AT OLD Charlie Miller's, a low shelter that was roofed with flattened tin cans, tacked on driftwood scantlings, the blazing sun made the roof glisten beyond the power of the eye to bear it, and concentrated so much heat upon the tin that the leaves which drooped close to it curled away, browning, and almost smoking. Inside the hut, the air was oven-hot, and the heap of leaves and grass that was the old man's bed crackled, as he moved upon it, like so much paper.

Old Charlie was mumbling and chuckling to himself:

"Say, Herbert, did you ever kill a man? *Sh-h-h!* Don't use that name Herbert around here! It isn't safe! Yes! But isn't that why you're hiding? Eh? Oh, I know! You can't fool me! Hee-hee-ee! But who's going to know anything about it? Let me ask you that! Nobody! They're coming to get one—just one. Let 'em come! If they're after me, they won't get me! Do you know why? Well, I'll tell you. They won't ever be able to track me! I scratch my footprints out! How's anybody going to know where I go, when they can't see where my feet made marks? I *always* scratch my footprints out!"

The path leading up to the bungalow on the mountainside lay between walls that were of so dazzling a green that, at the same moment, they ached and mended the eye. To save the labor of constantly cutting away new growth, the trail kept well to the bed of a rivulet—rocky, pool-dotted, making its descent lazily about any stones or hummocks that lifted in its way.

Even when winds and an overcast sky made a day less torrid than most, the climb was not one to be taken without a good reason, though the cost of the effort, in breath and sweat, was well repaid. For the track carried the toiler from one climate to another; and he passed out of the heavy air of sea-level to the lighter, fresher one of the mountain, where a breeze always blew, at that height which was above the liking of the mosquito.

The house at the end of the path was a barrack of a building, some forty feet long, and half as wide, all of cunningly woven split bamboo. Light as wickerwork, it was set atop heavy bamboo poles; and the luxuriant forest, pressing up to it from below, seemed to be holding it high in air, as if it were some sort of an airy-walled brown ark on a vividly emerald sea.

Along the whole front of the building, which faced southward, and overlooked the lagoon, there was a wide, breezy veranda, buttressed with bamboo. Under it, the thick-set, impenetrable jungle pushed its way, not stopping even when it met the underpinning. So that the porch jutted out, balcony-wise, over the dense and blossom-sprinkled growth.

It commanded a scene that was more like a gaudily painted map in relief than any combination of real sky and substantial earth and sea. The heavens were too blue, the bone-white beach was too white. The church and the store were doll-houses set down by a child among tufted blades of grass in a toy scene. The lagoon, feathered on its outer edge by palms whose bases seemed to be washed by a thin line of milky spume—that lagoon was a smooth and glistening oval mirror.

On the veranda that day there was the usual loafing and smoking and yawning, while pages were rustled, grass chairs creaked, or spoons tinkled in tall tea-glasses brought by Yang-lama.

But this lazy morning differed from others. That trio was more silent than usual. Welcome, his bald, sun-burned head leaned against the dull gray-green back of his chair, did not even hum "Little Brown Jug," and keep time to the tune with a tap-tapping of his bamboo cane. The silence was charged with self-consciousness. With a subdued excitement, too. And every few minutes the eyes of Heathcote and Brewer strayed from the pages open before them.

It was Brewer who brought up the subject which was in all their minds.

"Say! It strikes me as funny," he remarked, in his nasal, mid-Western drawl, running his fingers through his red hair, "that Raragona knows in advance that a cutter's coming to take off a man."

For a moment neither of the others answered. And into the short silence there came a tenseness.

Then Welcome rearranged his heavy legs, and shifted his broad shoulders.

"As I understand it," he returned, "the skipper of the *Tropic Express* was handed an underground tip in some port, and the tip leaked among his crew."

"On an island as lonely as this—" it was Heathcote speaking—"there's bound to be at least one man who's run to cover." Which voiced Snubby's belief.

"I wonder who the man is in this case," mused Brewer. "What's your guess, Heath?"

Heathcote demurred.

"Well, Brew, that's the kind of a guess a man doesn't like to make—judging somebody that might be innocent."

"Ah, what's the diff?" demanded the other. "I'll bet my hat that everybody's picking the victim. Go ahead, Heath! Who do you think?"

"The man I think of, I'm mighty sorry for," Heathcote answered. "He looks as if things had gone wrong with him since the day of his birth—as if his spirit is completely broken."

"You mean French," said Welcome.

"Something has hit Mrs. French hard," Heathcote went on. "Ever noticed her eyes? They look haunted. And, young as she is, the spring's gone out of her. She's like a sick animal, more than anything else. Like a high-bred Persian kitten that's suddenly had its cream and its velvet cushion taken away, and been pitched out into an alley to shift for itself. You know how cats stop cleaning themselves, and go to skin and bone along the curb? Well, that girl's lost her pride in her looks and her clothes. And when a woman does that——!"

"I don't believe it's French," declared Welcome. "I've never spoken more'n three words to the man, but I judge him by the way he treats his wife. *Never* leaves her. Nope, I'd sooner bet it was Snubby."

"Snubby!" exclaimed Brewer; and with a half-embarrassed grin, "If Snubby was to go, I'm the only man up here that'd feel the loss of him—and his gin."

"Oh, it can't be Snubby," argued Heathcote, considerately ignoring the younger man's observation. "He's no fool; and if he knew somebody might be looking for him any old time, he wouldn't run such a public place as a store and a gin-shop. Why, he doesn't miss seeing a single man that comes into the lagoon!"

"And Liverpool, too—he's always on deck when a schooner shows up. He wants to gab and ask questions of everybody. And chums up with every lout of a sailor who comes ashore, so as to be in on the drinks. He makes a pest of himself, so he isn't hiding. And as to French, we've noticed how exclusive he is. But we certainly can't say that of the other two down there, though they can certainly say it about us. And listen!"

For a moment, all kept quiet and silent, their heads half-turned toward the lagoon. The jungle-clad curve of the mountain below them acted as a sounding-board for all voices or noises on beach and harbor. And now, on the soft, fragrant air there was brought to their ears the clear, sprightly tinkle-tankle of a banjo.

Brewer tossed both hands in a significant gesture.

"You're right, Heath," he asserted. "It isn't Liverpool. That tune proves it. If he had anything on his chest, he wouldn't be sitting around on the beach, plink-plunking."

"If we eliminate French, and Snubby, and Liverpool," Heathcote pointed out, "we've got left just poor, old Charlie Miller. But he's been here since the palms came up. So if he's ever been guilty of a crime, he committed it so long ago that he wouldn't be wanted now. And what could the law gain by rounding up a pathetic one-foot-in-the-grave old simpleton of a cripple?"

"Just the same," rejoined Brewer, "the man that's wanted is one of the four."

Welcome smiled. "Unless it's one of us," he remarked facetiously. "Far as that goes, it might be." Whereat the trio laughed.

"And just as we're wondering who's going to be nabbed at the beach," reminded Brewer, "the beach is wondering who's to be taken from the club."

"Sure!" chuckled Heathcote. "But there are at least two people who know the truth—the man that's guilty and the *padre*. Because in a case like this, the *padre's* sure to know. I think the gentleman concerned would just naturally go to the *padre* for comfort."

"But, Heath," said Welcome. "Now tell me, honest: You're the one of us that's got a' iron-bound code, and so on, and split hairs on things somethin' cruel. But ain't you ever seen the time when you'd kill a man?"

"Yes. Who hasn't? But I'm —— glad I didn't have a gun at the time."

"There you are!" exclaimed Welcome. "And that's just about the whole difference between us and the man the *Quiapo* 'll take away. Now, I was awful near to pluggin' a man once. But it was dark, and I didn't shoot. If somebody had turned on a light——!"

"Well," put in Brewer positively, "I can say one thing, and swear to it by my hope of Heaven: In all my life, I don't remember ever wanting to kill."

"And that's a good deal to swear to," asserted Heathcote, laughing, "when a man's got a mane the color of yours."

"I suppose," remarked Welcome, musingly, "that a man who's killed another man must suffer a whole lot."

"In his conscience, you mean," returned Heathcote; "though, of course, a good deal depends on the circumstances surrounding the murder. If a man gets a raw deal, he probably isn't bothered much in his mind. And many a man who's lost his life wasn't half as decent as the man who took it."

"I wasn't thinking only about what a man'd suffer in his conscience," went on Welcome. "Must be another kind of worry that's hard to stand."

"You mean that maybe the cutter'll have the wrong dope?" suggested Brewer. "Say! It would be rotten if they'd make a mistake, and take somebody that wasn't guilty—jerk him away, and put him to a lot of trouble, and mortify him before this whole island, and in the port he'd be taken to. I know I wouldn't care for it, and I wouldn't want to come back to this island."

"But if a man was to get a free ride to Zamboanga," pointed out Heathcote, "or to somewhere else, and a look at new scenery, that oughtn't to cramp him much."

"Just the same, I don't want them to cart *me* away from here on any false charge," Brewer declared. "I can get drunk on Raragona without disgracing my folks. But to light up when I'm at the end of a cable—! Say! No wonder my name's Brewer!"

Welcome shrugged his big shoulders.

"Scandal's what you're worryin' about, eh?" he scoffed. "Suppose you were like me, and couldn't get your breath in more'n one or two spots on the face of the earth? Suppose you had the asthma? I should say let's hope they *have* got the right dope! I'd be in a whale of a pickle if they were to drag me to some spot where I'd be like a fish out of water! But it was another kind of worry I meant a bit ago. This: No matter where a murderer goes, or how far he gets away from the place he used to live in, he never knows what minute somebody's goin' to turn up and lay a hand on his arm."

"That's strain," admitted Heathcote.

Brewer wagged his red head. "Like the case of this poor guy, whoever he is, that's going to be escorted off to prison by the coast guard. Gods and little fishes, these'll be five long, uneasy days for him!"

"Ah! You've said something!" exclaimed Heathcote. "He'll suffer. Enough, probably, to make up for his crime."

"Worse than going over the top, don't you think, Heath?" asked Brewer.

"A thousand times worse. When a regiment goes into action, you can figure on at least two hundred casualties. So every man's got five chances to one that he'll come through all right. And he tells himself that it's the other fellow who'll get hit. But in this case, the man who's guilty knows that he's *got* to go."

"Oh, I don't agree with you," declared Welcome. "Maybe he's got a chance."

Brewer stared.

"A chance? How so?"

Heathcote answered—

"Maybe there's a second man on Raragona who's guilty."

"By thunder!" cried Brewer excitedly. "I hadn't thought of that! Maybe there are *two* men who're worrying worse than if they were going over the top! Say! What an idea!"

Welcome screwed up his blowzy face ruefully.

"All the same," he went on, "it's rotten to think that here's this island, so beautiful, and so sort of peaceful, where everybody behaves himself pretty good, and—down along the ocean somewhere there's a boat that's comin' nearer every minute, steerin' this way to grab one of us few white men."

"Gives a man a mean feeling," agreed Heathcote. "It's too much like cornering an animal, then clamping a steel trap on him."

Brewer got up, waving those freckled arms in the air.

"Oh, you two give me the pip!" he scolded. "For the love of Mike! Are we going to do nothing for the next four days but fret about who's going to be pinched?"

"We're just talking it over, Brew," soothed Heathcote. "We know we don't have to fret—except that no matter who's taken, the rest of us are bound to feel sorry for him; and after he's gone, we're going to miss him like thunder."

"It all gets on my nerves!" complained Brewer. "And I've half a notion to take a hammock, and a tin of biscuit, and leg it to the north side of the island, and stay there till the five days are up."

Heathcote looked serious.

"I shouldn't do anything as foolish as that, old man," he counseled. "The whole island would jump to the conclusion that you had gone into hiding. They'd nominate you as the candidate for the Government's cutter. And innocent as you are, you'd be marked on Raragona for the rest of your life."

Brewer dropped back into his chair.

"You're right, Heath," he declared. "I was only joking."

They lunched on the veranda, and together smoked and idled away the afternoon. When dark-skinned Yang-lama, resplendent in white breech-cloth and white jacket—as befitted a servant of three such masters—came bringing the evening meal of rice, fish and papayas, he found them still there, watching down to where fires of coconut coir, and dead wood from the jungle, made flickering spots of red in a long line before the village houses.

But the natives around those fires were silent. The mountainside echoed no shouts, no songs, no cheerful babbling, no sound of the flute or drum.

BY MORNING of the day following, a change seemed to have come over Raragona itself. The sun shone as brightly as always, the breeze drove across skies as clear of clouds. Yet the island was strangely darker—as if some great, nameless, unseen thing were shutting down over it. Also, the voices of the island, like the voices of its people, were lowered. The surf beyond the atoll was only a murmur. The palm-tops gritted together.

And throughout the dragging hours, no white man save the Spanish *padre* moved along the strip of curving beach.

All of a sudden, the *padre*, in a long black cassock, and with a huge umbrella over his head, was making himself very much a part of the landscape—deliberately exposing himself to the sight of all, and so that no matter at what time a certain anxious soul might chance along the quiet border of the lagoon, he could not fail to see that friend of all the troubled—and be able to seek him out for comfort and guidance before the thunderbolt of the law struck down its quarry.

Ordinarily, with a soldier's pack-satchel swinging against his back, he would have been making his way slowly from door to door in the village, inquiring after any who might be ill, advising, counseling, condemning and dispensing out of that satchel. For, as has been said already, the *padre* was more than a spiritual leader to the brown people of Raragona, whose dialect he spoke fluently, though he knew little English. He was physician, surgeon, teacher, judge, jury and Santa Claus.

For once, however, he was forgetful of his brown people. Now there was one who needed him most, and that one was a white man. The *padre*, with delicacy and understanding, did not venture to approach any one of the other seven on the island, understanding that by such an act he might throw suspicion on an innocent man. All he dared to do was to ramble to and fro, showing himself.

As he walked, he prayed, wording his prayer as simply as might a child at his father's knee:

"Spare the aged and crooked-backed lamb of Thy scant flock on Raragona," he pleaded, "that this poor servant of Thine may yet have a short time in which to wake his sick brain and pour into it the curing words of Thy mercy! And leave, O God, him that keeps busy the hands of all Thy weak, frail savages, that they stray not into idleness and profligacy! To the rest, dear, gracious Lord, in these days of great concern, give abundantly of Thy surpassing comfort!"

Thus did he ask specially that forgiveness might be vouchsafed Charlie Miller and the planter; but commended equally to the mercy and justice of their Maker, the saloonkeeper, the squaw-man, and the three aristocrats on the mountain.

By twos and threes the islanders came out to speak to him, the women being careful to don church dress before they approached the *padre*. The children strayed back and forth at his heels, watching up at him affectionately. But from a distance no white man motioned to him, asking his attention, appealing to him.

Yet he did not lose hope.

"They suffer my presence," he told himself. "They believe they will want me only once, and that is when they come to die—a day far off, and faint in the future. And that I can well understand—as long as matters go well with them, and they have no need for me. But while these three days are passing, that one man will remember me, will regard me as a helper. Then shall come a confession that will lighten his poor heart and I shall intervene for him with his God!"

All that day, Liverpool did not enter Snubby's, only hung about in the shade near by, picking what teeth still remained to him, and coughing now and then apologetically.

The saloon-keeper took no notice. Hat cocked over one eye, he kept busily at his work of unpacking and sorting that new lot of trade goods. And his cheerful whistle sounded in the big, dim bar, where the reek of gin and beer hung so that it was like a veil stretched across the door, catching at the nostrils of the loitering cockney.

At the plantation, work went on as usual. French was everywhere in the groves, overseeing the task of gathering, stripping and splitting coconuts for the new drying. On the porch of his bungalow, the hammock did not swing. But tired eyes looked out into the lagoon, where Welcome was paddling about in a canoe, scorching his skin to an even deeper red, fishing with more than his accustomed vigor, and singing over and over the plaint of an old song:

> "Do they miss me at home?
> Do they mi-i-iss me?
> At morning, at noon, or at night?
> Or lingers some gloomy shade round them,
> Which only my presence can light?
> Do they miss me at home?
> Do they mi-i-iss me——?"

On the deserted northern shore of the island, Charlie Miller was hobbling along a wet stretch of sand, making plain footmarks in it, and painstakingly brushing them out, while he cackled and jabbered to himself. His blackened old face was close to the ground, his free arm kept up a quick swinging. He looked like some gigantic, outlandish crab.

Up on the mountain, Brewer had Heathcote out in the solid shade of the heavy shrubbery by the turtle pit, delivering himself of something which was very much on his mind.

"Say, Heath, I'm stumped," he confessed. "It's about the big chap. Did you notice the way he acted this morning before he started off to fish?"

Heathcote was seated on a slab of black lava-rock. "I don't think there's a man on this island, brown or white, who's acting naturally these days," he returned. "And I didn't notice Welcome this morning. What was he doing? Watching for a ship?"

"It wasn't the watching. I watch, too. But he was up and down, in and out, all over the place—and jumpy."

"That's the way he gets before he goes fishing."

"But last night he was up and pawing around long after we turned in. And when you were snoozing, and he thought I was, I could hear him sigh every little while. Heath, Welcome's worrying."

"Maybe he's worrying about me, maybe about you. Welcome's a good old bear, and with this thing hanging over Raragona, he's saying to himself, 'Is the old club going to be broken up? Is one of the others in trouble—bad trouble?' That's what's eating the old chap."

"No, Heath." The tone was full of meaning. "You're wrong. Oh, I know it isn't just the thing for us to be talking over our partner, but I'm doing it because I'm anxious about him. I'm thinking of his protection."

"Protection?"

Now Heathcote understood. He got to his feet, astonished, and appalled.

"Brew!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"I think he's going to hit for the hills about tomorrow," Brewer went on. "I found a gunny-sack under the cook-shack last night. It had some dried fish in it and matches and biscuit and a can for water."

The other sank down, staring at the ground.

"Don't you think we ought to figure out how we can help him?" went on Brewer.

Heathcote pondered a moment.

"I hope you've come to the wrong conclusion," he said at last. "Welcome's probably going to take one of his fishing jaunts to the other side of the volcano. He's made 'em before, you know. And—and I can't believe— Oh, no! It's impossible!"

"Well, then, we won't say it's Welcome. We'll take the question up this way: Is the law above the friendship of us three? Suppose one of us turns out to be the man wanted. Shouldn't the other two keep him from being picked up by the cutter?"

"Frankly, Brew, that would depend on the facts in the case. I mean the innocent two would have to know the low-down about the—the trouble before conniving in the escape of the man concerned. The story the *Express* brought is that a murderer's wanted. Well, then, what were the circumstances surrounding the killing? Was it justified? Or not?"

"But ought any two of us to sit in judgment on a third?"

"Yes, Brew. Back in civilization, men sit in judgment on other men. We've never been able to study out a better way of arriving at justice."

"I guess you're right. And in this case, if there's a hatful of excuse to be offered on the side of the one who's in trouble, then the other two ought to help the third man to hide, or slide out."

Heathcote assented. "But if the two *don't* like the story told by the third, at least they needn't hold him, or let Snubby hold him. It would be a case of 'hands off,' and let the cutter crowd catch their man if they can."

"I agree absolutely."

"However, we can't insult an innocent man by asking him, square out, whether or not he's the person wanted, and what the details are of his crime!"

"Naturally not," said Brewer. "He'll have to make a clean breast of things."

"Yes," assented Heathcote. "And before it's too late. Oh, how I hope it isn't old Welcome! He's so decent and generous and fine!"

Brewer began to pace back and forth.

"I'll say he is! When I got off at this island, he asked me right up—no questions about money, or what I was, or anything else. Gave me a home from the start. And he was in the little, old cook-shack then, and didn't have any room to spare. When I took too much gin aboard, he was like a father to me. Heath, no matter what old Welcome's ever done back home, I mean to stand by him!"

"Of course, I'll do the same."

"Just as I'd stand by you. Didn't you put up the big bungalow? And——"

"That's all right," broke in Heathcote. "I live in it, too, and enjoy it every day and night. And I'd look nice in our big barn of a place alone, wouldn't I? So don't speak of that, Brew. Only—while we're all under this strain—don't touch any gin."

"All right! All right!" a trifle impatiently. "Though I do feel low today, and as nervous as a fool. I wish it was the first of next month. Then the whole business would be over and done with."

Heathcote laughed.

"You talk like a man who's going to have a tooth out."

"I'm blue, Heath. The whole business makes me sick! Here's this speck of dirt in the middle of the Pacific, jail enough for anybody, and so lonely it's a regular rat-trap. And the authorities have to come all the way down here to grab some poor devil! Spend hundreds of dollars in coal and salaries and wear and tear in return for a wretch who's already cut himself off from everything in the world that he loves!"

Heathcote laughed again, this time joylessly.

"Well, I suppose there's too much sunshine in this out-door jail for any man that's taken the law into his own hands."

"Down here," raged Brewer bitterly, "a fellow's nothing but a cursed vegetable!"

"Yes; and one vegetable here is going to be in the soup."

THE morning of the third day of that five Snubby had a caller. It was Mrs. French, and she knocked timidly on that door which was not made of lattice, but was the only solid one in Raragona, having been salvaged out of the part of a ship which had come floating against the atoll. Dawn was not yet come, and the saloon-keeper was still in bed. Bareheaded, with her hair damp from her running, and her anxious eyes red with weeping, she answered Snubby's shout of inquiry, then waited, trembling and looking about her, while he dressed and set his hat at the accustomed angle.

"Yeah? Well, what's doin'?" he asked her bluntly as he appeared and looked out at her.

Answering him, she lowered her voice.

"It's about Jeff—my husband. He didn't come home last night. And, oh, I can't think what's happened!"

Snubby stared.

"Didn't come *home?*"

"No! And what's become of him! I'm almost crazy!"

"Hm-m-m!" He shifted his look to the ground, and she did not see the disappointment in those yellow eyes. "So he didn't come home! But he didn't say he was goin'?"

"No!"

"Didn't take nothin' with him—clothes or grub?"

"No! I kept supper waiting."

"None of his help missin'? Or a boat?"

"Oh, he's not left the island! It's something serious! He's had an accident! Broken his leg, maybe! Or fought with somebody, and got hurt!"

"Then y' think he didn't take his revolvers with him?"

"Oh, I wish he had! But they're both hanging up at home."

Snubby controlled a smile of satisfaction.

"So he ain't armed."

"I've been up all night," she went on, "hunting him, and calling him."

She shook inside her faded wrapper.

"Too bad! But, listen, Mrs. French. You're here wantin' my opinion, and I s'pose that's what I better give y'. All the same, I don't like t' tell y' what I honestly think, for the reason that you ain't goin' t' like t' hear it."

She drew away from the door.

"Say what you believe," she retorted sharply. "Never mind what I like. I want to know what's become of him. If you can help——"

"I can put y' wise. See? I can tell y' what's what. But don't turn on me for it—after comin' before sunup t' ask me questions. I mean, don't go up in the air. Will y'?"

"Well? Well? What do you know?"

"Jus' this, lady: French ain't fainted, 'r twisted his ankle, 'r fell into the creek. No ma'am. What he's doin' is hidin'."

"Hiding?"

"Sure! That's what I said. Up in the jungle."

"What's my husband got to hide for? What do you mean by talking like that! What——"

He leaned out over the sill to snarl at her, an angry flush showing under his rough, pasty skin.

"I *said* you'd turn on me! You don't want the truth! You want a fancy yarn—that he's been out watchin' the stars shine on the ocean, 'r the sun come up, 'r some other fool thing like that!"

She stood her ground stoutly.

"I don't want to hear anybody blacken Jeff—when he's injured or dead!"

"He ain't injured, and he ain't dead." Snubby spoke like a man who knows the facts. "But the Government's cutter's on its way here. Git that? And your Jeff has jus' naturally took t' the woods!"

Again she drew away from him, breathing hard and glancing from side to side, overwhelmed with wrath, but at the instant finding no words with which to express herself.

"The cutter! What difference does *that* make? What does Jeff French care about the cutter!"

"Ha-a-a-a!"

Snubby shook one hand loosely in the air, gesturing his wisdom, and his ability to know when sand was being dusted across his vision.

"I tell y', day after t'morra the *Quiapo's* due in here—t' pick up a man who's wanted for murder. I got that from the last trader. And straight off I picked French for the guy that'd be took. This shows I was right. Mrs. French, y're a temp'rary grass-widder. And what you better do is go home and keep y'r mouth shut—'stead of standin' here, wastin' y'r breath, makin' a squeal that's intended t' fool the balance of us. Sa-a-a-ay! You don't fool nobody! *You* know where French is! *Sure*, y' do!"

"Oh, how cruel and mean you are!"

Now his anger was righteous.

"Cruel, hey? And mean? Well, what's y'r Jeff ever done for me, I'd like t' know! Never sets a foot inside my door, does he? Never spends a peseta in the place! Cruel and mean! Crimini! Why, he ought t' be took—livin' on Raragona, and pretendin' he's all right, when he's a murderer! He'll be no loss t' the island! And I've never liked him!"

She threw up her chin, her eyes hard with hatred and scorn.

"You'd like him if he spent his money for your gin! But he doesn't, and he can die in the jungle for all you care! And you call yourself a white man!"

"He's likely t' put me in a rotten bad light with the cutter people," Snubby raged. "Put me under suspicion—me, that's counted on t' help out the Government in such cases! Because they're likely t' think I was in on the game all the time! Been hidin' him, as y' might say! Cover stuff, for cash! Anyhow——"

She cut him short by turning and hurrying away, trailing her long, bedrabbled skirt through the wet grass as she made in the direction of the church.

Snubby lifted his voice to call after her.

"Better not git anybody t' hunt him," he taunted. "Y'll put y'r foot in it if y' do! The brown sailor boys, *they* savvy the jungle! They'll fetch him out of it, all right, all right! And soon enough t' suit y'. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Before the bungalow of Padre Araneta, she turned into a narrow, white path, pebbled with sea-worn coral. The path led to the freshly mopped front veranda of the tiny parish-house. And a moment later she was mounting bleached wooden steps to a woven door over which was pinned a holy picture.

A coffee-grinder was sounding cheerfully from inside. As she approached, it stopped, and there was a shuffling sound. Then a brown boy opened the door and peeped out. He was wearing a neat pair of denim trousers, and a bright red calico shirt. At sight of the visitor, a look of surprize came into his slanting eyes.

She scarcely saw him.

"Padre Araneta!" she called loudly. "It's Mrs. French!"

"Señora!"

As the answer came from within, the boy vanished, leaving the door ajar, and the tall, somber-clad figure of the young *padre* came forward out of the dimness of the living-room. A gold cross swung against his breast. He halted on the threshold, framed by the casing of bamboo.

"I don't like to disturb you," she told him. "But I'm in trouble!"

He lifted lean hands in a gesture of sympathy.

"I ver' sorry! W'y you don' come bee-fore? But now we talks."

He came on to the veranda, reached to a chair, and drew it forward for her. "Plees!"

She did not sit.

"Just before supper last night, my husband told me he was going to look for some ripe mangoes. That's the last I've seen of him! *Padre*, he didn't come back!"

He had been looking straight at her, listening gravely. Now of a sudden he averted his gaze. And not an expression of alarm, but one of embarrassment, came into his dark eyes.

"*Señora*," he said gently. "We pray to the good God. He helps all tam'."

She twisted her hands together.

"Oh, yes, I know! But God won't help me if I won't help myself! What do you think I ought to do, *padre?* Some of the copra hands are out looking for him now. Will you ask the rest of the village to hunt?"

The deep olive of his face took on a dull red. He covered his mouth with his fingers, and cleared his throat; then, gently, reluctantly:

"*Señora*, maybe your 'usban', he is go 'way from his own wishes. Maybe he like that you don' make hunts. Maybe better you waits."

At that, her lips quivered pitifully, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"You're thinking about the cutter. And I suppose everybody on the island will think the same. The saloon-keeper accused my husband of being in hiding. But it isn't true! If Jeff has ever done anything wrong in his life, I know one thing—he won't run. He isn't that kind. Oh, please believe me, *padre!*"

He put his hands behind him and paced back and forth in the little veranda, his tonsured head bent in thought. Presently—"You think your 'usban', he is tell to you ever'thing that is happens bee-fore you knows him, and marries with him?"

"We were brought up in the same town. I've known him ever since I was born. He hasn't kept anything back from me. He couldn't."

He stopped, hooking his thumbs into his black waist-cord.

"I don' ask it from you to make a question of you my business," he explained. "Only I like for help you."

"*Padre*, he didn't even take any cigars."

A smile softened the *padre's* solemn young countenance.

"Thees thing show!" he acknowledged.

"Then you *will* ask everybody to help hunt him!"

He held up a fending hand. "*Señora!* I are ver' sorry. I hopes you understan'! But if I do so, the cutter-boat, she will think I are against your 'usban'. Don't you see? So I can' go look for Señor French. No. It would not be good for me to do. Las' week, yes. All right. But jus' now——"

She turned away, sobbing.

"*Señora!*" His voice was deep with sorrow. "I think only of what other peoples say. I do not like for hunt Señor French. That will make bad talk. He is not go so long yet. Better you waits till the cutter, she is away again."

"Thank you," she said over her shoulder. "I know how you feel. But he isn't hiding! He isn't!"

The previous evening, those natives who had searched for French had combed the plantation thoroughly, and looked under and into every building. Now, following Mrs. French's return to her bungalow, a party of them circled the island on foot, keeping pace with others who were in an outrigger, paddling along well outside the surf line. Later in the day, every foot of the atoll was gone over, the edges of the jungle were beaten, and all trails were traveled—all except the steep, green-walled trail to the bungalow on the mountain. No native climbed so high to inquire about the planter.

HEATHCOTE spent that morning over a book. Welcome lounged in a chair, looking off upon the sleeping sea, and now and then tapping in time to that plaintive song, hummed under his breath:

"Do they miss me at home?
Do they mi-i-iss me?
'Twould be an assurance most dear
To know that this moment some loved o-o-one
Were saying 'I wish he were here.'

To know that the group at the fi-i-ireside
Are thinking of me as I roam;
Oh, yes, 'twould be joy beyond measu-u-ure
To know that they miss me at ho-o-ome,
To know that they miss me at home."

Since breakfast, Brewer had been moody and silent. He was inside, where the spacious, unceiled room was in gloom, for the *kajangs* were lowered against the unscreened window-openings. Out of the dimness stood certain bright spots—Heathcote's half-finished canvases; the big reading-table, covered with white oilcloth; colored maps, chromos that were Dutch advertising calendars, the gay placards of Japanese steamship lines, and others extoling Manila bottled beers; also three white navy hammocks at the western end of the room, swinging a few feet apart on ropes which hung down from the bamboo rafters.

Brewer was in his hammock. In one hand he held a large, square-shouldered bottle full of pale liquid. Every little while he sat up, drew the glass-topped cork, set the bottle to his lips, and took a generous swallow.

When he had drunk a third of the bottle, he called out to the men on the veranda.

"Say! What's the matter with the old fellow? Sounds like you're lonely, Welcome. Have y' got the blues? You give me the pip!"

Welcome called back cheerfully:

"Oh, don't git the pip! Say the word, and we'll slide down and have a swim in the lagoon."

"Going to have a nap," Brewer answered. "I've been digging in my garden and my head's bad."

Heathcote and Welcome exchanged a look.

"I'll be glad when that new bottle of his is finished," declared the former, keeping his voice low.

The elder man nodded.

"Must be at least a month since he's touched a drop. Been stickin' it out pretty good."

"But now it's another gin-bout."

"'Fraid so."

Brewer was faced toward the rear wall of the house. Against it Heathcote's trunk and bag were set, convenient to his hammock. Above them, over a short length of rope stretched between two bamboo uprights, were draped his clothes. And still farther up the *swale* wall he had hung some illustrations cut from magazines, and from the pictorial sheets of newspapers. Most of these showed city scenes—buildings, streets, parks. One had been reproduced from the photograph of a beautiful girl. Brewer entertained himself with looking at them.

But when Welcome again began to hum that song absent-mindedly, Brewer suddenly got up and swayed his way to the front door.

"Look here, you two," he began. "How about a nip of this? Hey? Gang's too down in the mouth lately to suit me. Need a jolt. Sit up, both of you, and take a little nourishment."

Good-naturedly, the other men refused, pleading that they felt bright enough.

At that, Brewer shrugged, once more placed the bottle to his lips, took a long drink, coughed huskily, leaned his back against the door-frame, and fell to laughing, his red head lowered to his chest, and wagging.

"Y' know what you and me talked about yesterday, Heath?" he reminded. "I mean about helping the man that the cutter's coming after."

"Yes," Heathcote replied. "But don't talk about it now, Brew. You're lit!"

He gave Brewer a warning glance.

"Sure I'm lit," agreed Brewer. "And that's what makes the whole business seem all the funnier. You think it's one man. Welcome thinks it's Liverpool, or Charlie Miller. Ha ha! Ha ha! Ha! You're all wrong! Everybody's wrong! I'm the only man that knows exactly who it is."

"Go and lie down, Brew," suggested Heathcote. "Nobody knows who it is, and you last of all. Go and take a snooze. That's a good chap. And if you leave the club, don't start any story about knowing who's the man. It might get us all into a peck of trouble—spreading gossip that'll make enemies."

Brewer sobered. Irritation showed in his half-shut eyes. "But I *do* know," he persisted. "What's more, I'm the only man on Raragona that does."

Welcome was disgusted.

"Don't argue, Brew!" he ordered. "You're stewed to the gills!"

"Look here, old fatty!" The square-shouldered bottle was shaken in admonition. "Don't be sore 'cause I'm a little squiffed. I know what I'm saying. And I tell you, I'm the only man who knows, and the reason I know is that—I'm the guy."

A moment that was electrical—while Brewer's look shifted triumphantly from Welcome to Heathcote and back again, and he grinned broadly.

Then like some great frightened animal, Welcome came piling up out of his chair.

"You!" he gurgled hoarsely.

Heathcote also stood.

"Take it easy," he counseled. "And we'll all keep our voices down. Remember, this is Echo Mountain. Now, Brew, old fellow, you're plain drunk, and I'm not going to see you get yourself into a tight squeeze with a lot of slack talk."

Brewer swayed the width of the door.

"I may be drunk," he conceded, "but I'm talking straight."

Heathcote came to him.

"If you talk wild and it gets carried down to the beach, you'll be picked up by the cutter."

A look of fear paled Brewer's freckled face. With an explosive curse, he flung the bottle from him, sending it whirling into the green tangle level with the veranda.

"I took a few swallows on purpose to get up my spunk," he confessed. "The cutter's what's worrying me. I don't want to be picked up. But I'm the man they're after. I'm the one!"

He lunged forward to a chair, and sank into it.

Plainly shaken by the admission, Welcome also sat.

"That's tough! And what're we goin' to do? The cutter'll be here day after t'morrow."

"Do?" exclaimed Brewer. "You've got to back me up! Heath, you and me, we've talked it over. I tried you out. You know what I mean. And you promised that if the story was told before it was too late, and if it was all right, the man'd be helped—that it was the duty of the other two to stand by him."

"And I'm still of that opinion," answered Heathcote, soothingly.

"Heath, I never intended to hurt anybody! On my honor, I didn't! I got drunk, and there was a fight. I can't remember it, even. That's why I was telling you the truth when I said—and swore to Heaven I wasn't lying—that I couldn't ever remember wanting to kill a man. I can't! But they told me I did—the next day, when I was getting over my spree. So I skipped. But now they've located me! They're after me! And I'm trapped! Oh, I was a fool to come to a small island! I might have known there wouldn't be any chance to jump out again if I was spotted!"

He humped forward, covering his face with both hands.

Welcome leaned to lay a comforting hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"But listen, Brew! This thing must've happened more'n two years ago. That's a long time. And in a case of this kind, time makes a lot o' difference. People git over their mad. The excitement dies down. The widow marries, 'r the mother dies, 'r the family moves away, and so on. So if the cutter takes you, why, you'll have a better chance than you would've had if you'd stayed and stood trial right after the business happened. Don't fret, Brew. A jury's bound t' be easy on you."

Brewer straightened in his chair, glaring wrathfully at the comforter.

"*Easy!* Easy, your grandmother! I lied when I said I had relations that I didn't want to disgrace with my boozing. I haven't got a relation in the whole place, and no money to speak of. What's worse, the—the man I had the fight with was the son of a big politician. And if I get into the clutches of his gang, I won't have a chance! I'm done for! They say I murdered! They'll hang me sure!"

His face twisted into an agonized expression, he reddened swiftly, fell back into his chair, and broke out into loud sobbing.

"Brew!" entreated Heathcote, kindly. "Brew! We can't do a thing for you if you don't keep a hold on yourself. Come, old man! Buck up! We'll beat this thing. But we need our wits—our nerve. We must be cool."

Brewer swung round, catching at Heathcote's hand. "Oh, Heath, I am cool! But it hasn't been any joke, carrying a load of this kind around on my chest. I've felt like a dog, here with you two good pals, and fooling you about why I was here. But I'm not to blame for what happened! Booze did the whole thing! Curse the stuff! If my town'd gone dry before it did, I wouldn't be in this jam. The law didn't protect me from getting drunk and killing a man when I didn't know what I was doing. Why, the police in that town stood for that dive, and took bribes to look the other way. And now those same bulls'll turn the key on me!"

He wept again.

Once more Heathcote calmed the younger man.

"Considering your weakness, Brew, you didn't get a square deal. A man like you needs looking after, and the authorities betrayed you when they didn't chase you home, or into a sanitorium. But what about your drinking here? Welcome and I don't like it, but you won't listen to us."

"I tell you, I got half cock-eyed on purpose! Just to spill the beans! I won't drink another drop! Honest! Didn't I pitch the bottle overboard?"

"Yes. And you mustn't forget that if you do drink again, so that you can't think, or act, for your own salvation—well, you're lost."

"Heath, I've got a load off my mind. I'll be as steady as a rock! Why, I feel better already! And, oh, I count on you! You'll think up some way to get me out of this!"

"I can't get you away unless a schooner shows up."

"What do you say to my hiding?"

"If you hide, the bluejackets will hunt you. If they don't find you, you'll have to get away anyhow, because everybody on Raragona will know that—that—" Heathcote completed the sentence with a gesture.

"Know I'm a murderer," blurted out Brewer. "Yes. And our happy family'll be broken up. That'll be tough. I hate even to think of it. Though, maybe, now that you two've heard what I've done, you'd rather have me go."

"Now, Brew," chided Heathcote kindly. "Don't begin that kind of talk. We're not going to pull the holier-than-thou on you."

"I should say not!" bellowed Welcome, heartily.

"I could stow away on a schooner," Brewer went on. "But——"

"If a schooner shows up today or tomorrow," Heathcote interrupted, "your only hope lies in bribing her skipper. Because he's bound to be told about the *Quiapo*. And you must pay him to stow you away, so that you can shift schooners at some other island."

Brewer rose, and his look searched the miles of sea stretching to the dim horizon.

"A schooner's got to show up!" he cried desperately. "I won't be taken like a rat in a trap!"

Welcome had a suggestion.

"Heath, what about goin' down and runnin' up the cargo signal back of French's? Boats're always passin' here—far out. They don't stop if they ain't asked to. We'll make 'em think there's a load o' copra waitin'."

"Good idea!" Heathcote answered. "He can't see it from his bungalow, and he won't know it's up. But we might have trouble in laying our hands on French's flag. So I think we'd better get busy and make one of our own."

They set at the task at once. A large red handkerchief, and four white ones, made an excellent counterpart of the plantation signal. Heathcote did the sewing. And as Heathcote plied a clumsy needle Brewer tramped the veranda, watching the ocean.

"Who do you suppose told on me?" he fretted. "A waiter in a restaurant in Frisco gave me the eye pretty hard when I was taking my ship there. And on the trip down there was a man who wore an Elks' button in his coat-lapel that asked me an awful lot of questions. Also the skipper that landed me here was an awful nosey guy."

Heathcote tried to argue away the other's suspicions. "When a man's on the skip to save his skin," he pointed out, "he's under a big strain, and he notices and magnifies everything and lets his imagination run away with him. I know the case of a chap who gave himself up because a policeman on the corner winked at him. As a matter of fact, there was something wrong with the lid of the copper's eye!"

Brewer's tear-stained face managed a grin.

"Just the same, I've never liked the way Snubby's acted toward me," he persisted. "I've always suspected he knew more than was good for me."

Welcome looked grave.

"Now, there maybe you're right, Brew. It's always struck me that Snubby acts like he's got some kind of underground authority."

"Exactly! More'n once I've had the idea that he was a Government spy. And he's got flat feet. I'll bet forty dollars that he's been a policeman in his time."

Heathcote laughed.

"Why, Brew, Snubby's been more decent to you than any other man on the island."

"A-a-a-ah!" Brewer came short, shaking the finger of wisdom. "That's the whole trouble, Heath! From the first, he's been too friendly to suit me—and too interested in finding out all he could about where I came from, and what I worked at back in the States! I don't trust that bird! Didn't he keep a poor devil of a sailor in his place for months, and then turn him over to the cutter, cold? I guess I know! Fattened the wretch up for the ocean-police, that's what he did, confound him! And I'll tell you one thing, and I mean it: If they come for me, as I go past his rotten dump I'll take him by the neck, if I'm not handcuffed, and I'll choke the life out of him!"

"Now, Brew," counseled Heathcote, "you know, you may have to sleep in the brush for a week or two. So you stretch out inside and get a little sleep—while we finish the flag and sneak it up."

"All right. And, Heath, dope out what I ought to take with me in my gunnysack. I can't seem to think straight any more. My brain's going in circles."

As he turned to enter the bungalow, from far below on the beach there came the faint sound of a merry and musical strumming.

Brewer flung up his arms.

"That cursed banjo!" he stormed. "It gets under my skin! Here I am, half-crazy with worry, and he can sit down there with his youngsters and plunk away! Of course it couldn't be that good-for-nothing squaw-man who's wanted for a lifer's cell! No! It's got to be me!"

The flag-making progressed rapidly. As Heathcote stitched, silent, and grave of face, Welcome pounded up and down the veranda, like a ship's watch-officer on the bridge. And could talk of nothing but the coming of the cutter, and Brewer's danger.

"By thunder, but I feel bad for the boy!" he declared. "I'm all broke up about him, Heath!"

THE signal finished, Heathcote folded it away in a pocket and set off down the path. It was now mid-morning; and once the mountain's shoulder was descended and the breeze left behind, the heat of the jungle was oppressive, so that he plunged into it as into a steam-bath.

He emerged again at a point just above the little, white church. There, he halted—to wait until the heat of noon drove whites and browns to cover, when he would be better able to run up his flag undetected.

Keeping himself concealed, he looked down at the white half-moon of beach; the atoll-rimmed lagoon, the still, blue-green of its water sparkling like a jewel set in a ring of jade; the bleached roof of the gin-shop far to the right; and, just as far to the left, the blinding spot that was old Charlie Miller's.

Then, of a sudden, his eye fell upon something that sent him hurrying back up the trail, joy and relief on his perspiring face. Welcome was still patroling the veranda. Heathcote called to him, waving the improvised flag.

"It's all right!" he announced. "It's all right! What do you think? French's signal is up already!"

All excitement, Welcome ran to rouse out Brewer.

"There's a chance!" he exclaimed. "There's a chance! Throw t'gether what you'll want t' take! French's signal's up!"

Once more the three gathered on the veranda. But Brewer, while pleased at the news, was not oversanguine.

"Look here!" he said. "Suppose I go down to get aboard some trader. Snubby mustn't know about it, or he'll interfere sure. And suppose I get away—that bartender'll send the cutter after me!"

"We'll manage the business so's Snubby won't know," assured Heathcote. "It can be done by greasing a palm or two. And I've a suggestion—a corking one, if I do say it."

"Shoot!" urged Brewer.

"It's up to you, Welcome," explained Heathcote.

"Me?" The elder man stared. "What in thunder can *I* do?"

"This—mislead the authorities. You and Brew are about the same build and the same complexion. Of course, you're a good bit older, but if you'd had all this trouble on your mind for a couple of years, that might have aged you. Well, my idea is that when the cutter comes, you go down and give yourself up."

Now Welcome looked appalled. *"Me?"*

"Surrender—let 'em arrest you temporarily. Meanwhile, Brew'll be sailing away to safety!"

"And I won't ever be trailed again, you bet your life!" vowed Brewer. "This time I'll go where a cutter won't ever come!"

Now Welcome spoke again.

"You got a first-rate plan, Heath.

First-rate! The only trouble with it is that it ain't no good. A description of Brew wouldn't suit me worth a hang! Besides, my name ain't Brewer."

"Neither's mine," admitted the confessed murderer.

"But I couldn't fool the cutter people," Welcome went on. "They'll have a photograph, likely. Maybe fingerprints. And how'm I t' keep up a bluff about bein' a man I ain't?"

"I'll post you," Brewer returned. "Give you the names, dates, and so on. Say—do it for me, old man!"

Welcome shook his sun-burned head.

"Sorry, but I can't."

"It's the best plan for helping Brew to get away," Heathcote put in. "And I know you want to do that. Why, you two are like brothers—been together so long before I showed up."

"I know, I know! Just the same, it's impossible." He smoothed at his bald poll.

"But why?" pleaded Brewer. "A trip in the cutter couldn't do you any harm. Only inconvenience you."

Now Welcome snorted.

"Inconvenience! Huh! So that's what y' call it! They'd put me in irons on the way up, and in the brig! That'd mean bad grub. In port, I'd be slammed into jail. More bad grub. Also, dirty quarters. And you talk about inconvenience!"

"I don't believe you'd suffer on the cutter," argued Heathcote. "If you're quiet, and don't put up a fight, they won't iron you. And you wouldn't be jailed long. Two or three days after you reached port you could tell them you weren't the man. Then all they could do would be to turn you loose, and back you'd come."

"Sounds fine!" returned Welcome, sarcastically. "But you ain't considered that I might be carted all the way to the Middle West! Also, they might punish me plenty for playin' a trick on 'em!"

Brewer showed signs of being aggrieved.

"If things were the other way, Welcome, I'd do as much for you. All I'm asking is for you to give me a chance to get away, if a ship shows up, or keep them from hunting me if I hide in the jungle. But you seem to forget that my life is at stake!"

"So's mine! So don't try t' make me feel like I was sendin' you to the gallows! You ain't rememberin' about my asthma! It's why I stick so close to Raragona. I been in Singapore and Manila, both. The climate didn't agree with me. Could hardly git my breath in either place. I'm not a strong man, in spite of my husky looks. Not strong at all! If I was t' be shut up in a cell in Zamboanga, say, at my age, why, likely as not I'd never git over the experience! My heart'd give out on me, sure! And I'd die like a fish out o' water!"

Looking his disappointment, Brewer turned away, as if to cut short any further argument.

Heathcote stopped him.

"Don't go, old man. Stay and let's study the problem. Guess it *was* too much to ask of Welcome."

Brewer dropped into a chair. The substitution plan having gone awry, he displayed, not only disappointment, but fresh concern. But——

"It's all right, old sport," he assured Welcome, generously. "You can't take any chances with your health, and, anyhow, they've probably got a photo of me. If I take to the brush, maybe you won't mind swearing I'm not on Raragona."

"Glad t' do that. But, Brew! Say you was t' git away on some schooner. We'd tell the *Quiapo* you're in the brush. But if they didn't find you, wouldn't they suspect the schooner, and go chasin' right after her? You know the Government! When it's trailin' a man, it hangs on till the cows come home! I think you'd be safer right here on this tangled little island."

"No. Because the minute my schooner was out of sight of Snubby, I'd hand the skipper an extra hundred bucks, and tell him to change his course."

"But I've got another proposition!" announced Heathcote. "It'll knock suspicion galley-west! Suppose a trader comes in today. We'll leave the bungalow just as it is, throw a few things into one suitcase, announce that we're taking a short trip, and all *three* go aboard her!"

Brewer was up on the instant, a flush of gratitude hiding every freckle.

"Do you mean it, Heath? You'd go with me—and, Welcome, you——?"

"I'll say I will!" was the hearty answer. "Willin' to' take that much chance on my asthma! One island's as good as another, anyhow for a short time. Need a vacation, don't we? Bring on your trader!"

"By thunder, you two are proper pals!" cried Brewer, his voice breaking. He wrung the hands held out to him. "If I'm not alone—if you two are with me—I'd rather be on another island than here."

The spirits of all considerably lightened, they idled away the afternoon on that front veranda, sometimes finding a point to discuss in the present situation, more often sitting in silence, but always watching the sea—that waste of smooth waters, the spacious highway upon which the wished-for trader might come, the limitless track over which would steam the dreaded cutter.

"Darn that string of coral rocks!" complained Welcome. "I wish they wasn't between us and the Pacific! They kind o' shut us in. Make a man feel like he's in a cage—a cage with palm-trees for up-and-down bars!"

Brewer groaned.

"Say! You can think of the most unpleasant things! Don't mention bars till I'm out of this!"

"I think we oughtn't to stay too close to this house," was a suggestion of Heathcote's. "Especially you, Brew. Suppose you go fishing tomorrow morning. You know, we all ought to show ourselves—act as if we weren't a bit worried."

Brewer agreed.

"That'l be the slickest way to slip aboard. You make the bargain, with the skipper, Heath, the minute he comes ashore. Then when you and Welcome come out with him, I'll be in the cabin waiting for you."

Toward sundown, the proud Yang-lama served his evening meal. And when it was over, and cleared away, pipes came out, and smoke was wafted, driving away any vagrant insect.

"No ship yet," Brewer remarked, "in spite of the plantation flag."

"What I can't understand," Heathcote returned, "is why French is signaling at all. He hasn't got a cargo. Old Fula-lua told our boy that the *Tropic Express* didn't get all the copra she wanted."

Brewer straightened excitedly.

"But suppose you were right, after all, Heath, when you picked French as the man the cutter's after! Say! That almost makes me think I've got a chance! And if he hasn't got any cargo, why *should* he have the signal flying—unless he's trying to get away?"

"Well, no matter why French's got the flag flyin'," concluded Welcome, "let's thank our stars that it's up!"

The sun rolled its brazen shield nearer to the rim of the ocean. And now both the cloudless sky and the lazily heaving waters suddenly took fire. They were like two converging lakes of lava. Their beauty was terrifying. It was as if the whole world were aflame.

"But there are other places just as wonderful as Raragona," declared Heathcote, cheerful as always. "And when we find one that suits Welcome, all we've got to do is build again. Luckily, bamboo's cheap!"

The volcano-red faded out swiftly. A brief twilight succeeded. Then came the night.

Dully, his big shoulders bowed, Brewer stared into the dark. "I've had a lot of time down here to think things out," he told the others. "And I can see what a fool I've been. Also, I've come to understand how the whole rotten business happened. I tell you, I was educated up to what I did! Yes! That sounds funny, but I was educated up to it while I was in college. It's the solemn truth!"

"How do you mean 'educated?' " Heathcote wanted to know.

"I got to chumming with a certain little gang. And those chaps—they called themselves 'advanced'—they steered me on to a lot of freak books, and crazy ideas. They preached that we youngsters didn't have to behave ourselves. This was the big idea: If you felt like doing a certain thing, no matter what, do it! Restraint was all wrong. To —— with self-control!"

Welcome snorted.

"Say, boy! That's a fool-killin' idea!"

"It killed off this fool," agreed Brewer. "I swallowed the stuff—hook, bait, and sinker! And whenever I felt like cutting loose with the booze, I did it. The leader of that gang was a chap who was always laughing at the men who studied hard. Called 'em 'grinds,' and 'high-brows.' That's the guy who took every bit of ambition out of me. Switched my whole line of thought. And got me to piffling away my time on the books *he* thought I ought to read."

"Well, did he practise what he preached?" Heathcote asked. "Did he turn himself loose? Or were those wonderful ideas just for your consumption?"

Brewer gave a bitter laugh.

"Just for me! While I was sousing, the crafty little mischief-maker was boning his head off, and passing high in his examinations. So maybe he was jealous of me. Anyhow, he'd stopped my progress, and was steaming away himself. And today, I'm a fugitive on a South Sea island, ready to take to the jungle, and he's the mayor of my home-town!"

LATE in the night, when the bungalow was in blackness, except for the squares of soft moonlight spotting the floor just inside each open *kajang*, there was a troubled muttering from Welcome's hammock. Heathcote, who was drowsing, rather than sleeping, wakened fully, and lay listening. The lashings of Brewer's hammock creaked as its occupant also roused and tossed restlessly.

Then for a little there was silence, broken only by the gentle rustling of the thatch and the far-off booming of the surf.

The stillness was interrupted by Welcome's voice, low, slow, cautious, secretive.

"They'll never take me!" he declared. "They'll never, never take me!"

There was another silence. Heathcote held his breath.

Presently, Brewer rose noiselessly to a half-sitting position. And now he spoke, as confidentially and insinuatingly as had the sleeper.

"*Who* will never take you, Welcome?" he demanded. "Who?"

Welcome stirred.

"Why, the police," he answered irritably.

Again careful to keep his voice on the same level as Welcome's, Brewer asked a second question—

"What do the police want you for, Welcome?"

A moan.

"Because I killed *him!*" was the whispered answer.

The next moment, Brewer was on his feet.

"Heath!" he cried, aloud and excitedly. "Heath!"

Something like horror was choking Heathcote.

"Y-yes?"

"You heard that?"

"Don't make a row, Brew!"

"Row!" bellowed Brewer. "I'm to lay quiet, eh? Be the goat on Raragona! I guess not!"

He felt his way to the reading-table.

"I'll cinch this thing right now!"

He fumbled for the matches, struck one, and with shaking hand lighted a lamp. Then he came striding back and seized Welcome by the shoulder.

At the touch, Welcome, though still asleep, fairly catapulted himself out of the hammock, and grappled with Brewer.

"Lemme go!" he yelled. "Lemme go!"

But Brewer held on firmly.

"You won't take my place? You won't let 'em arrest you temporarily—so I can have a chance to get away!"

"No! No!" Welcome was glancing from side to side, scarcely understanding what was happening.

"And why not? Why not?"

"I've *told* you why!"

"Aa-a-ah!" sarcastically. "Your asthma, eh?"

"Yes! Say! Are you crazy, or drunk—howlin' around this time o' night?"

"Brew! Welcome! Don't wake the island!" Heathcote came to stand beside them.

However, Brewer was determined to speak his whole mind.

"But you got over your asthma mighty quick when Heath said we could *all* go! Well, now, my fat fisherman, I want the truth! Understand? I don't see why I should be the only one to stand the gaff!"

Once more Welcome's eyes roved, uncertainly, helplessly. "I—I don't know what you're drivin' at," he faltered. "I ain't told you no lies."

Now the younger man mocked.

"You ain't told no truth, either," he declared.

Wrathfully Welcome backed out of Brewer's hold.

"I excuse a lot in you, Brew," he returned, trying to talk quietly, "because I know what gin does t' y'. Heath, he's got the D. T.'s!"

"Now, don't hand me anything like that!" warned Brewer. "You're pretty foxy! You let me turn myself inside out! Well, now it's your go at it! I'm not the only man on this island who's wanted for murder!"

Welcome swallowed.

"Never said you was."

"You let me think it—and you're in as bad a jam as I am! And just as afraid of the cutter!"

Now Welcome was more collected.

"That ain't so, Brew. I'd put it stronger, only I realize how worried y' are and I make allowances."

"Don't try to fool us any longer," returned Brewer, scornfully. "You've given yourself clean away. You talked in your sleep."

"Wha-*what?*"

"We both heard it," Heathcote put in quickly. "Couldn't help it, old man."

"Yes," Brewer added. "So just calm down."

At that, his sunburned head bent forward, Welcome made slowly toward the table, sank limply to a bench, leaned his elbows on the oilcloth, and covered his face with both trembling hands.

Instantly Brewer softened.

"Oh, I don't want to act rotten about it," he said, going to stand beside the shaken man.

"It's all right," Welcome answered. "I don't hold nothin' against you. Maybe it *is* me they're comin' after."

"It's some comfort to know I'm not alone in this hiding-business," Brewer went on. "Also, I'm not one man out of seven: I'm one of *two* out of seven—yes, maybe one of *three!*"

Welcome took down his hands and grasped the edge of the table, so tightly that the knuckles stood out like white knobs. "I won't give myself up!" he vowed fiercely. "I'll take to the jungle! If they find me, they'll take me dead!"

"Ah, don't say that, Welcome!" pleaded Heathcote.

"My name ain't Welcome."

"Whatever it is, I'm your friend," Heathcote went on. "And I'm going to stand by you! We'll all get away tomorrow if we can—make for Tulur, say; then push down into the Moluccas."

"It'll be fine if we can." But Welcome was pathetically hopeless. "In the mean time, guess I better tell you two my yarn. The whole thing started this way: I get a tip on a horse-race. It looked like a sure one. I was branch manager of a certain business. I had property of my own. I wanted t' put down a big bet on that race. But I couldn't close a mortgage quick enough to give me the cash for the bet. I made arrangements for it anyhow—in case I lost; then I helped myself to the money out of the company's funds. The horse runs. I win. The bookie, he skipped—the welcher! On top o' that, in walks a' auditor. I'm short. I pay my shortage. But I come close t' bein' convicted for embezzlin', and I lose my job and my reputation. In fact, I'm clean ruined. The bird that's cheated me out of my winnin's has made a criminal out o' me. So I look him up, and—I shoot him."

Now Brewer was seized with a revulsion of feeling, his fear that he was the only culprit on Raragona having considerably lessened. Still in his pajamas, he walked up and down the long room, his face looking pale and sickish in the lamp-light.

"But it'll be me the cutter'll want when it comes!" he mourned. "That's my luck!"

"Now, Brew!" soothed Heathcote. "I know it's an anxious time. But just let me point out that if two or three of us are in danger of being taken, it's likely that there are more."

"No! In all my life, I've never got away with anything! Never even hooked an apple out of an orchard without being caught! I'm so blamed easy to identify—my height, and my red hair!"

He swung his arms above his offending head.

"If only the *Quiapo*'d go down! Oh, for a typhoon! Or an uncharted rock!"

Welcome guffawed hoarsely.

"Some one told me once," remarked Heathcote, "that every condemned prisoner prays for a whale of an earthquake, which'll open the jail and let him out."

"I wish the old volcano'd open up," prayed Brewer, fiercely, "and blow the whole works to Kingdom Come!"

The three did not return to their hammocks, further sleep being impossible. Heathcote induced the others to make themselves comfortable on the veranda, and urged tobacco upon them. Then he talked to them, until the first sleepy bird-calls out of the jungle, and the distant crowing of fighting-cocks in the native village, announced the new dawn.

With the coming of the light, all stood up and scanned the sea. The eastern sky was roseate. The ocean was pearl and rose. But they were indifferent to the beauty spread out so lavishly before them.

There was no sail in sight.

"We've got a corking good chance to draw a trader in today," declared Heathcote. "It's so clear they can see the signal almost from the horizon, and there's breeze enough to hold the flag out."

It was when they were having breakfast that Heathcote suddenly raised his hand.

"Somebody's coming up the trail," he warned in a low voice.

Brewer sprang up to look over the rim of the veranda, and saw a battered gray bowler bobbing its way toward them between the walls of foliage that shut in the rocky path.

"It's Liverpool," he announced.

"What's *he* comin' for?" asked Welcome. His prominent eyes were bloodshot. He rolled them apprehensively.

"He's up here for a purpose," answered Heathcote.

"Snubby's spy," added Brewer. "Checking up on us. Wants to see if we're all here."

"Don't act worried," advised Heathcote quickly. "This chap's as keen as they make 'em. Be casual. Don't let him startle you—no matter what his gossip is. And don't show any suspicion."

A MOMENT later, lazily and leisurely, the cockney mounted the steps leading up to the veranda. The bowler hat was clamped over the back of his head. A native cigaret drooped from his unshaven lips. He halted.

"Mornin', sirs," he said respectfully, touching his hat.

Heathcote jerked up his head in well-simulated surprize.

"Oh, hello, Liverpool!" he returned heartily. "You're taking an early walk."

Liverpool removed the cigaret, shut his small eyes, and showed his empty gums in a smile.

"I'm 'avin' a look abawt," he agreed.

"Well, come and have a cup of coffee," invited Brewer. He clapped his hands to summon the house-boy.

"Thank you kindly, sir. I could stand a trifle."

Now he shed that air of languor, and stepped forward with alacrity as Yanglama, a study in black-and-white, came smartly into view, a large tin coffee-pot in one hand, in the other hot biscuits wrapped in a cloth.

Gingerly Liverpool seated himself on the outermost edge of a grass chair.

"You gentlemen 'ave it swanky 'ereabawts," he commented, looking into the living-room across the top of a cup. "Sort o' like a bloomin' 'otel. No blighted wonder they calls you a club. This flamin' island needs a few more aristocrats like you gentlemen. Swine, that's wot I calls most of 'em 'ere, except the parson. Me, I knows gentlemen w'en I sees 'em, 'avin' been associated with the upper clawsses w'en I was a stooard."

Heathcote made a polite rejoinder, following it up with kind inquiries regarding the state of health of Liverpool's family. Brewer expresed an opinion on the weather. Welcome had something to say about the chances of his getting mullet in the near future. The trio ate and yawned and stretched, but displayed not the slightest curiosity.

"Then, I suppose y've 'eard the news?" the cockney remarked.

"We don't get much news up here," rejoined Heathcote.

"Snubby sent me up t' awsk y'," Liverpool went on; "awsk y' if y'd seen anything o' French."

There was a moment's pause. Each of the trio was busy concealing the fact that he was startled—each was waiting breathlessly for one of his two companions to reply.

Heathcote spoke.

"French? Why, no, we haven't seen him up this way. I can't remember his ever being as far up as this."

"Night afore lawst," Liverpool drawled on, "French 'opped out."

Brewer put his upper teeth over his under lip, began feeling in his trousers pockets, failed to find whatever he was looking for, got up, and disappeared into the living-room.

"Hopped out?" It was Welcome, polishing his bald dome as he shot a keen glance in the cockney's way. "What boat?"

"No blawsted boat. 'E's in the bush. And 'is missus is near balmy. She's been to Snubby's *and* the parson's, a-cryin' abawt it, and she's 'ad the beaches 'unted and the plantation and——"

But apparently all this was of no concern to Welcome, for he was up and rambling in Brewer's wake, crushing a cigar to dust in his hands as he went, and murmuring something about winding his watch.

"—'e's been gone since yestidy mornin'," Liverpool concluded, and rose.

"Yesterday morning?" repeated Heathcote. "Why haven't we been told of it before?"

"Because y've got a 'igh-an'-mighty rulin' rawjah for a 'ouse-boy, and 'e don't mix socially with the other nytives," was the explanation. "Any'ow, we thort it was no use t' trouble y'. First off, we thort French's nytives'd find 'im. But come lawst night, and no word. And no word this mornin'. 'E's quit Raragona for good is my way o' thinkin'. In a proa, likely. Well, thank y' kindly for the coffee, sir."

With a touch to that gray and greasy Napoleonic wisp hanging down his forehead, he swung slowly but jauntily to the head of the steps, gave one backward quick nod of farewell, and the next moment the bowler had bobbed from sight below the matted floor of the veranda.

Heathcote did not wait to enter the house by the door. He stepped under a lifted *kajang*. And here were Welcome and Brewer grappling once more, only now they were gurgling joyously, and smacking each other on the shoulder, and doing a bear-dance of hilarious relief.

"We're safe, Heath! We're safe!" cried Brewer.

"Your chances are better," amended Heathcote.

He shook hands with the two.

"No, Heath! French has had a tip that he's the man wanted, and he's taken to the brush!"

"Sure!" chimed in Welcome. "I'd bet my hat on it!"

"But his wife's been hunting him," Heathcote pointed out. "And if she suspected he was afraid of the cutter——"

"Shucks!" exploded Brewer. "All that hunting stuff is a part of her game! She's pretending, just as you meant to pretend! The signal's up, isn't it? But there's no cargo! Oh, I'm not a bit fooled by her! She's throwing the rest of the island off the scent. All the while, husband's probably hiding close to his house."

"Poor French!" exclaimed Heathcote. "Poor, old, pitiful, discouraged French!"

Brewer pointed a triumphant finger.

"I was right when I said 'Snubby's spy!' That bartender thinks French is the man wanted, and sent his handy-man up here to find out what we know."

"You bet y'!" assented Welcome. "Snubby's playin' hand-in-glove with the Government people!"

"Say! If we'd only known about this yesterday!" Brewer went on. "I'd've kept my expansive mouth shut!"

Welcome grinned ruefully.

"But I'd a-talked in my sleep just the same," he declared. Grateful tears were swimming in those bulging eyes.

"Anyhow," added Brewer, "I'm glad we didn't budge from this house. It's a dead give-away to jump out."

"Suspicion's on French, all right," agreed Heathcote. "So if a ship shows up today, nobody'll think anything's wrong if we all go aboard her."

"But, look here!" Welcome appeared uncertain. "If a schooner don't come, I'm not so sure it'd be wise for us t' be in reach of that cutter in the mornin'. Now we know that out of seven whites on this island, three, at least, 're in the same box. But! We ain't got no guarantee which one of the three is *the* one."

"If we could only get a few particulars about the man that's wanted!" exclaimed Brewer; "—a name or a description, or what State's asking for him."

"We can't." Welcome was emphatic. "So in the mornin', why don't we two go into the jungle and pretend we're huntin' French?"

A bellow of appreciation from Brewer.

"Say! That's an idea! Fatty, you're a wonder!"

Heathcote had a proposal.

"Instead of going fishing today, Brew, why don't you go down to Mrs. French's with Welcome and me, and we'll tell her how sorry we are and offer our help."

"Good idea!" pronounced Welcome. "It'll give us a chance to size things up—and see how Mrs. French acts, and so forth."

"And under the circumstances it's the decent thing to do," Heathcote added.

More cheerful and hopeful than they had been since the first day of the five, they put on their coats and set forth. Half-way down the mountain, they turned eastward through the jungle along a short cut that brought them out behind the native village. Here were no signs of excitement. The brown women were going about their domestic tasks. As usual, the men-folk were lounging and smoking. But in noticeably large numbers—proof that work at the plantation was suspended.

"Why you not go for hunt boss-man?" Brewer asked one of the copra hands.

The fellow shrugged.

"Him no more alonga island," he answered carelessly.

They went on.

"Say, Heath, you do the talkin' for us,

will you?" asked Welcome, as the French bungalow came in sight.

"But I won't pump Mrs. French," Heathcote retorted, with a touch of something like anger.

Since leaving the mountain, he had not spoken, but walked along seemingly deep in thought, his look from time to time anxiously scanning the sea.

They passed the building which housed the primitive machinery for stripping the coconuts and cutting them. All these were deserted. Nor was there any one at the bungalow. Mrs. French was on the beach, standing bareheaded, the gentle monsoon blowing her stringy hair and billowing her patched wrapper about her. She turned as the trio approached, evidently startled. Now her eyes were so large a part of her delicate face that she seemed all eyes. Her pale cheeks were streaked with tears.

"You—you have news?" she faltered.

Heathcote uncovered.

"No, Mrs. French. We've come to offer our help. My name is Heathcote. These gentlemen are Mr. Welcome and Mr. Brewer. Please tell us what we can do for you."

She smiled faintly.

"Nothing," she answered. "My husband has disappeared from the face of the earth. The man at the store says Jeff's hiding, because he's afraid of the cutter. It isn't true, but I'm afraid the *padre* thinks the same. Anyhow, he won't order the natives to hunt the mountain. And they refuse to go by themselves. They say the debbil-debbils have carried away my husband. I thought I might be able to bring in a schooner that'd help me, so I put up the flag. But one hasn't come. And I'm helpless by myself. If I knew where the mangoes were, that he spoke of getting, I'd go there and look for him. But I don't. I've been along all the trails, and I've called. I stayed up in the jungle last night and listened. It's no use. All I can do is wait for the cutter. The sailors'll hunt him."

She turned again toward the sea.

Promising to search the mountain back of their bungalow, they took their leave, walking in silence until they were out of hearing. Then:

"She's honestly worrying about French," Brewer declared. "But I'll bet he took a sack with him, just the way I'd planned to do—tobacco and food. He didn't tell her his plans, because then she wouldn't have worried, and he's counting on her worrying to blind the eyes of the rest of us."

"You know what I think?" asked Heathcote. "I believe French got into a panic over the *Quiapo*, went up into the jungle and shot himself."

Welcome grinned sheepishly.

"Just the same, t'morrow mornin' I'm goin' t' hunt him," he announced. "Fact is, I'll hunt him before that—if the cutter gits in ahead o' time."

"But we won't play the ferret on French," Heathcote asserted. "If we find him alive, we'll keep our mouths shut. I may not be right about him, but I'd be willing to bet my last dollar that if he ever killed anybody, the murder was justified. French strikes me as a clean, just man."

In silence they climbed to their bungalow. For them, as they went, the voices of the island changed that chorus. Snubby and the *padre* believed French was the man wanted by the cutter. Snubby was almost certain to be right. So the languidly swishing palm-tops, the rustling forest-leaves, the trickling rivulet along the trail, all seemed to be saying, "We know! We *know!*" And from beyond the green atolls, the accusing ocean boomed a name—"French! French! French! French!"

Welcome and Brewer were now in the best possible humor. During the heat of the day, they played cards.

"Say! I never had asthma in all my life," admitted the former. "Feel mean about pullin' a yarn like that."

"I've yarned, too," Brewer admitted. "I've been getting letters. Knew I had to, or it'd look suspicious. So I've been writing different people—all strangers—and asking 'em questions. That kept mail from the States."

The two laughed the boisterous laughter of relief. Heathcote stretched near by in his chair, joined in. But his laugh was nervous.

AT OTHER points on Raragona there was laughter that day. In the baking-hot hut among the vines and creepers, old Charlie Miller laughed crazily. In his dim, liquor-scented barroom, Snubby laughed in triumph. From the first had he not picked the right man? He would tell the world he had!

But the loudest laughter of all came from the shack on the beach, where Liverpool lived. He slipped his banjo from the rags and tags of what was left of a sea-going kit-bag, tuned the strings, gathered a group of brownies about him, and twanged a brisk Guards' march. But before he began, he laughed the full-bellied laugh of a hyena.

"French!" he snickered. "French! Oh, plums in a puddin'!"

Toward evening, on the mountain, with the final meal of the day past, and the light too poor for cards, the trio sat in their veranda, gazing down into a black pit which was the lagoon, smoking uncounted numbers of cigarets, and speaking only now and then, and that low and gravely.

"I hope tonight's supper ain't the last one we'll ever eat t'gether," Welcome remarked.

"It's a good bet we'll enjoy as many more here as we want to," Heathcote answered.

"Yep. But I'm an old hand at bettin'. And the surer the shot looks, well——"

"Just the same, I'm playing French to the limit," declared Brewer. "Besides, how do we know that any cutter's coming at all? Maybe some Smart Aleck on the *Tropic Express* manufactured the story out of whole cloth."

But a little later, as Welcome was humming a verse of his plaintive song about home, Brewer broke down and wept, and Heathcote had once more to play the rôle of consoler and strengthener.

"Why don't you go down and have a little chin-chin with the *padre*," he suggested "I'll light the lantern for you. Go ahead, boy!"

Brewer would not go.

"I'm a trifle unstrung," he explained. "That's because I've kept myself pretty well in hand these last two days, and haven't had a drink."

He led the way to hammocks.

Late in the night, Heathcote suddenly wakened. He lay still, listening to the heavy, regular breathing of the others. Then he heard what had wakened him—a queer, discordant, half-muffled call, evidently that of a young fighting-cock, croupily announcing the dawn.

He had undressed down the room from the big table. Softly he got out of his hammock, crept foot by foot to where lay his clothes, dressed and tiptoed to the veranda. There he leaned against a bamboo upright, fixing his eyes upon the vast ebon pool below.

An hour passed, then another. Body and eyes, he ached. But he did not move. presently, that first bird-note sounded. Next, from the village coops, went up lustier heralding. Then there was a swift lightening everywhere. The atolls took shape, the sea emerged. That dreaded fifth day began.

Upon the arc of misty gray water that stretched to the line of the sky, Heathcote's look roved. After a little, he saw, lifting along the horizon to the westward, what appeared to be a cloud-blur. As he kept his eyes focussed on the blur, it drew out into a thin, dark, smudge pointed with white.

"The cutter!"

No uncharted rock had found her, no typhoon had swept her under. Handmaiden of stern justice, she was marching straight ahead for Raragona.

And then a strange thing happened: Heathcote, the prop, the stay, the comforter; Heathcote, the one who had nothing to fear, and was beyond suspicion, turned uncertainly to the right—to the left—gasped like a man in agony—faced square about—darted into the living-room by one door—sped out by another—and, in a very panic, fled away into the jungle.

In his terror, instead of veering to his right, where the high ridges were clothed with an almost impenetrable growth, he rushed toward the left. A hedge of ferns and creepers received him. But he burst through this; and a moment later found himself on the bare, black lip of the dead volcano.

Bareheaded, his face blanched, his breast heaving, he paused for an instant, and, like a hunted animal, stared about him. The sun was rising. The sea was visible on every quarter. He could look down the northern slopes of the island, as well as upon those more familiar. And into his brain, now almost delirious after the long days and nights of strain endured quietly, there came a strange fantasy.

He was riding a monster fish that was swimming west on the surface of a blood-red sea, head and tail curved playfully, dusky crest high in air, yellow-green dorsal fin shining in the sun. And up the sides of the colossal creature were splashing green waves of verdure that broke over his giant back.

But that smudge was nearer—much nearer! And in his white clothes, did he not stand out boldly against the sable crest of the fish?

With an inarticulate cry, he scrambled down from the crater lip and once more thrust himself into jungle.

He did not progress far. Across his way stood up a mass of green canes through which were looped great vines, the canes and vines being laced together by creepers. He had to fight his way into the tangle foot by foot, almost inch by inch, tearing at the creepers with his naked hands, and being torn by them in turn; swaying the weight of his body upon the vine-bound canes to bend them, and having them sway back upon him like rods of steel.

When he had gone forward the length of his own body, and the way had closed behind him, he found himself caught as if in a trap. There was no air stirring, and he could scarcely get his breath. His mouth was parched. His legs refused to support him. He toppled sidewise. The thicket gave, but held him up. Panting, the perspiration pouring from his body, he half-stood, half-lay.

"They won't get me!" he murmured. "They won't drag her name through the mire! Margaret, I'll drop down here. It's for your sake! For yours! Oh, my dearest!"

As he leaned, gasping, his eyes closed, suddenly there came to his ears a long, strident blast—the whistle of the *Quiapo*.

It was the voice of pursuit. It was a triumphant threat. A challenge. A promise of attack.

It brought him up straight. It made him want to run—fast! Fast! Compelling his exhausted body, again he fought the dense growth, using head and hands, knees and feet. Without realizing it, he wedged himself through the gap he had just made. And a few moments later, swayed through the edge of the canes and toppled to the ground.

Here was a light breeze. He could breathe. But he was too spent to walk. And he was cut and bleeding.

Presently, hearing the sound of water, he crawled for a rod to where a spring trickled out from under some boulders and spread itself among low ferns and thick moss. With trembling fingers he dug a hole in the soft, verdant mat covering the ground. The hole filled with water. He placed his lips to it. Then again and again he emptied it of its cupful of cool drink.

When he sat up he was refreshed and curiously calmed. The brief delirium was over. He could think. About him the mountain-top was fairly open. He meant to stay in the open—not venture again into a torturing, smothering covert.

But, all in white as he was, surely he would be easily discovered! He tore off his clothes and threw them down.

When he stood all naked except for his feet, he understood that he had not improved matters. Against the emerald of the forest, his untanned skin could be as plainly seen as the white canvas of his suit.

To one side some red dirt showed where a tree had become uprooted and torn away from its mooring in the slope. Out of the ragged hole left by the tree-butt, he scooped up handfuls of soil, brought them to the water-filled hollow in the moss, mixed them to the consistency of mud, and smeared himself from head to ankles. To darken his back, he carried water to that hole, sprinkled the ground, then lay down and pressed his body into the damp earth.

On his feet once more, and ready for further flight, he saw that the sleeve of his white coat had trailed in the ooze of the slow-filtering spring, and was itself a bright green. That gave him an idea. Taking his clothes, he hunted patches of slime in the moss and dragged his garments through them. Then he took them under his arm and started away.

A quarter of a mile farther on, screened by some tree-ferns, he stopped to look off at the sea. Now what had been a white point to a smudge-line was a tiny, masted vessel. From her funnel was pouring a round column of smoke which, caught by the monsoon, was drawn down to the waves and spread out into a wide, inky pall.

It was while he was halted, his wet clothes dripping green water down his muddy flank, that again he heard what had waked him in the night—a queer, discordant, croupy call.

But now it was startlingly close at hand. As it sounded a second time, and as he stared across an open space carpeted with vines, he saw a section of those vines move, as if dragged at from below. Next:

"Help! Help!" called a muffled voice. "Help!"

Heathcote dropped his clothes and ran forward.

"French!" he answered.

"I'm under the vines! I'm in a pit!"

Again at one place the thick vine-carpet heaved, billowing like a shaken blanket, followed by a sound of scrambling and splashing, and a rattling of loosened stones, after which there rose slowly through the woven fibers of the carpet a yellowish, sulfurous dust.

"Came up on the mountain to get some mangoes," went on that muffled voice. "Was walking across here, and shot down into this hole like a stone."

The plight of the other man had fully restored Heathcote's poise. And now he realized that what Mrs. French had said was true: Her husband had not run to cover, did not fear the cutter; he had only met with a mishap.

"I'll get you out!" Heathcote called down.

Taking a stick, Heathcote began cautiously to prod through the treacherous vine-matting to find solid ground. Thus he made his advance toward the brink of that pit. When he found it, he knelt and began to tear away the strong, woven tendrils forming a lid above French's head.

"Careful!" warned the planter. "Don't put your weight on the vines! They're rotten! They'll let you down! Then we'll both be in a fix!"

When Heathcote could see the matted, hatless head below, he hunted until he found a small dead tree, took hold of it a few feet from the ground, snapped it off, brought it back to the pit, and thrust it down the shaled side.

"Good!" called up French. "It isn't so far down here, but it's steep, and whenever I tried to climb up, the rocks and ashes came down on me. Could you let down about ten feet of lawyer-vine?"

Heathcote found a much longer piece, which he hacked off with a sliver of slate, and patiently untangled from a network. When one end of this vine was in French's hands, the latter wound it round his body just under his arms. Then with French clinging to the pole, and feebly climbing it, and with Heathcote braced and pulling steadily on the vine, with another rattling of stones, and amid suffocating dust and ashes, slowly the planter came bulging through the hole Heathcote had made.

Unnoticed by Heathcote, while he had been preparing to help French out of his predicament, clouds had moved between the island and the sun. Now as he backed away from the pit, dragging the planter up and out, with a seething sound, one of those sudden tropical showers began, the warm rain falling softly but copiously.

It drenched the man lying prone on the green-covered ground. But gratefully he turned his face up to it, letting it wash the dust from his face and hair. And he opened his mouth wide to take in the welcome drops.

As for Heathcote, standing unclothed behind French, the downpour washed him clean. Involuntarily he helped in that, rubbing the wet dirt from his body.

Then he spoke, raising his voice to make himself heard above the crash of the rain on the vegetation.

"French, the cutter's coming in."

French moved, lifting his scratched hands to the shower.

"—— the cutter!" he answered. "Does this fool island think I'm worrying any about her?"

"That's why they didn't hunt you."

The planter groaned.

"Oh, my poor wife!" he exclaimed. "My poor girl!"

But with French eliminated so far as the *Quiapo* was concerned, who then would be taken aboard the vessel this day? When panic had seized him at dawn, Heathcote had not paused to ask himself that. He had not cared—if he himself could be safe, if, above all, he could spare *her*. But now, as he looked through the sheets of straight-falling rain, and the mist rising a little to meet the rain, to the blurred sea far below, and saw the cutter swaying along over the gentle swells, he thought of Welcome, and Brewer.

"It is isn't French, then it's one of us," he told himself.

He recalled how Brewer had wept the night before, and pictured what he had not seen then in the dusk of the veranda—the streaming eyes and twisted mouth. He pictured Welcome, too—pathetic, fat, weak, helpless, likeable Welcome, who in all his life had probably never done any downright strenuous act except that one which had resulted in the taking of another man's life. Here those two belonged, the boy who could not let liquor alone, and the great, plump baby of a man who loved to fish in the glassy lagoon and laze along the white beaches.

"And here they'll stay," he concluded. Aloud, to French, he added, "Feel better?"

The planter turned himself upon his face, struggled to his knees, and held out a hand for aid.

"Down trail," he replied. "Take me!"

Heathcote sprang to his assistance, put a shoulder beneath one of French's arms, and the two started away—as the rain slackened with a suddenness which suggested that it had been turned off at a tap, the clouds divided overhead, and a sun as hot as it was prompt poured out its heat everywhere upon the mountain-top, increasing that rising mist.

If the planter had noticed anything unusual about Heathcote's appearance, he failed to mention it as they went slowly along. Instead, he grumbled crossly:

"It's a wonder the people on this island couldn't look for a man when he's missing two days! Let him starve to death in a blow-hole! Let his wife go half-crazy!" Then with undeserved commendation, "Mr. Heathcote, you seem to be the only man on Raragona that's got any sense!"

"Your wife told me you hadn't run from the cutter," answered Heathcote. "And I promised I'd look for you. I'm mighty glad I found you!" His sense of humor restored to him, he indulged in a faint grin.

They had bent their slow steps in the direction of the Club. As they neared the cook-shack standing behind it, the dark face of Yang-lama showed at a small window-opening in the rear of the little building. The servant's eyes were rolling in amazement at the sight of the two strange figures. He seemed about to take to his heels.

Heathcote called the boy out.

"Here! You come take Boss French alonga his house," he commanded.

Then as French did not halt, being too eager to continue on his way, Heathcote disengaged himself from the planter's hold, slipped the white-jacketed Yang-lama into his place, and the two went on, French stumbling now and then, and complaining weakly.

As the walled path hid the two, Heathcote walked slowly to the back door of the bungalow, and entered the living-room. Welcome and Brewer, though this was the morning of the portentous day, were only now dressing themselves, having overslept. A little surprized, and somewhat amused, they looked up at the tall, slender, naked figure of their companion, which, in the gloom of the big apartment, was like a statue cut from coral.

"Well, Adam," Brewer sang out.

Above the white pillar of Heathcote's body his tanned face was like a mask. He answered gravely, sadly—

"Call me Cain."

Welcome threw his arms wide, staring at Heathcote as if he thought the latter had gone mad.

"Ha—wha-what—?" he stammered.

Brewer rose, like an automation released by a spring.

"*Heath!*" he cried aghast.

"I want to tell you both something," Heathcote went on.

"Not you too! Oh, good God! Not you!" It was Brewer again, appalled, imploring.

"Yes, I, too."

Brewer began to shake with mirthless laughter.

"Three of us!" he cried chokingly. "All of us bluffing as long as we could! Oh, it'd be funny if it wasn't so awful! The Murderers' Club!"

"You blamed Welcome for not telling his story when you came out with yours," Heathcote went on quietly. "Now I suppose you'll blame me. Well, I'll tell you why I didn't speak. My story has to do with a—a—with some one very dear to me."

He turned, went to the wall alongside his hammock, and unpinned that picture of a girl.

"My name isn't Heathcote," he told them when he came back. "And I'm not an artist. I'm on Raragona because I'm a murderer, and I thought this island was the end of the world. Well, it's not so far off the main track as I thought. And I'm sure I'm right when I say the cutter wants me. You see, that killing affair I was in got a thousand times more publicity than what either of your cases did. The papers were full of the awful thing. I don't know how I ever got away. I belonged to well-known people. I'd just married a girl who was prominent socially, and—and beautiful. This is her picture."

He held out the illustration.

The others said nothing, only nodded.

Carefully Heathcote folded the bit of clipping and tore it to bits.

"A man had done her a wrong," he went on. "As soon as I was married to her he let me know about it and he tried to get money. When I wouldn't give him any, he threatened to talk. I—I killed him before he could."

Again a pause. During it, from the lagoon below there came a hoarse, metallic rattle, followed by a loud splash. The *Quiapo* had dropped her anchor.

Heathcote continued:

"The most terrible things that are done in the world, it seems to me, have no penalty attached to them by the law. Here was a beast who had preached vileness to a young girl under new names, calling it 'soul-freedom,' and 'the larger life,' and 'liberty' and 'tolerance,' and 'self-expression.' So I killed him, just to show him that two could play at the self-expression game. And now neither of you shall be taken, because I'm the man they want, and I'm going to put on my clothes and go straight down to Snubby's, and get it over with."

"Give yourself up?" demanded Brewer. "Don't be such a fool! Take your chances with the rest of us! This makes four who're in trouble. Three of us are bound to get off. No, don't do it, Heath! The right man's French."

"Brew's right," broke in Welcome. "Slip into your pajamas, and we'll have breakfast. We ain't worryin'. I'm pretty sure nobody knows where I am. More I think of it, the more sure I am. Anyhow, there was a lot of sympathy for me when my case came out in the papers. Public opinion was on my side. I read it all before I got away. So I'm for sticking right under this roof. The li'l old cutter don't mean nothin' t' me! So—" ironically—"don't go and bust up this exclusive organization."

"Yes, t' —— with ducking out!" Brewer went on.

He sauntered down the room with something of a swagger.

"I'm going to take my chances. If it's me they want, why, it's me, that's all. But it's dollars to doughnuts they *don't* want me. So here I am, and here I stick! Let the —— himself come! They——"

"They probably want me," Heathcote interrupted calmly. "And if they do I can't protect anybody's name by running, because everything will have been told, and the more trouble I give the cutter people the more notoriety there'll be. So I'll go down promptly, and get the whole thing over. I've had all the strain I can stand."

"But, Heath!" Welcome came to the younger man, blinking those prominent eyes in worriment. "You've forgot somethin'. The right man's French."

Heathcote shook his head. "The right man *isn't* French. He hasn't been hiding. Just now, up in the jungle, I found French. He'd fallen into a deep cinder pit—a blowhole. And——"

He got no further. For at the news, the other two, suddenly losing their attitude of sureness and indifference, stared at him for a moment, in renewed trepidation, then caught up their hats and went scrambling out.

"Good *night!*" called Brewer over a freckled shoulder.

Heathcote watched his companions till a forest curtain of dripping green shut them from sight. Then he finished drying himself, dressed, ate a generous slice of papaya at the cook-shack, hunted his best cane, put on the soft straw hat at its accustomed angle, lighted a cigaret, and stepped out upon the veranda.

Far below, a new toy had added itself to those other toys. White and dainty, it was set on that glistening, oval mirror. And now, up over the flower-topped jungle, there sounded four pairs of clear, imperious, musical notes. It was the *Quiapo*, striking eight bells.

But to Heathcote, it was the voice of the Law.

"All right," he answered. "I'm coming."

He started. The going was not easy. That rivulet which, in places, formed the trail, was now, following the shower, an excited and noisily hurrying stream. More than once Heathcote was compelled to wade it, white trousers turned up, shoes and socks in hand.

When he reached that point above the coral church, he dried his feet with a pocket handkerchief, dressed them, then straightened and took a last survey of the scene below him—the waving, heavy-headed palms; the beach, now like sparkling alabaster; the blue-green lagoon; the atoll, even from this distance not unlike a long, planted window-box ruffled with blowing, snowy lace, which was the froth of the quieting sea; the gin-shop on one hand; on the other the wavering line of the native town; the distant plantation, where shouts were going up; the jungled hog-back to eastward; the burning spot that was Charlie Miller's hut.

When the survey was done, he threw up his chin.

"Now!" he said aloud, and continued on his way.

He did not go directly to the beach. A small boat was only just separating itself from the cutter for a first trip to the shore, the oars rising and falling in rhythm. There was yet plenty of time. He turned left toward the *padre's* bungalow.

It was deserted. He uncovered and entered the church. No one was there. In the soft gloom of the high-walled room, the hewn coral of the altar stood up luminously. The altar-light, a bit of cloth floating in a bowl of coconut-oil, glimmered like a star.

Heathcote knelt.

Outside, under the low-hanging eaves of pandanus, the birds were cheeping a cheerful chorus. They brought back to him certain long-remembered words:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father——"

But he was not able to frame a prayer. He was inarticulate. He could only surrender himself to his God, resign himself to a justice higher than man's, make a belated peace.

Out in the sunlight once more, he had a last thing to do—take leave of his mountain. Black, tortured, forbidding, the volcano reared itself a thousand feet into the vibrant, crystalline air, its level crown throwing off the bright embrace of the jungle.

"Good-by, old girl!" he said up to it. "You're sure to be here if I ever come back."

He could not trust himself to look at that brown wickerwork structure which, set high in air, had for so long been to him an ark of safety. He went striding away to the saloon.

"There's one point that I must make clear at my trial," he told himself as he followed the path among the palms. "The jury must understand that killing was the only thing I could do. It wiped out the tongue that could babble. Whereas, if I'd tried to punish Aikland in any other way—by giving him a —— good whipping, or showing him up to his friends—I'd 've played right into his hands. He wanted a row. If he couldn't have money, he wanted a row, so the story would come out."

THE HALTED at Snubby's side door—that solid door which gave to the bar—and peered into the big, canvas-ceiled room. Standing in the glare outside, it was his ears that told him the place was deserted; his nostrils, that much liquor had recently been spilled. But as his eyes grew more accustomed to the subdued light, he saw what startled him: A wreckage of chairs and tables on the sanded floor; behind a counter scattered with bits of glass, a mirror shattered from top to bottom; and everywhere broken bottles lying in little pools.

"Well! Well!" ejaculated Heathcote. "Another drunken mix-up here last night!"

But as he turned away from the door, he heard the low, even tones of a man's voice. It was coming from round the nearest corner. Heathcote walked to that corner, and peered beyond it.

On the south side of the gin-shop, where was that shaded square of packed dirt which was set with tables and chairs, was gathered a colorful group. Its outer border was made up of Filipino seamen, in white uniforms. Next, and seated on the ground, came black-headed, golden-brown natives, silent, wide-eyed.

The center of the group consisted of four men. One of these was plainly the commander of the *Quiapo*—a trim, white-clad, ruddy-faced young man, sitting, cap straight, back straight, hands on knees. One was Snubby, also seated. Strangely enough, he was bare to the waist. What was more curious, he did not have on that stiff straw hat. He was leaned forward in his chair, his arms making a V between his knees.

Behind Snubby, wearing a long, black cassock, stood the young *padre*, erect, motionless, grave, his gentle mouth set, his soft, dark eyes far-seeing, yet fixed, one slender hand resting on the back of the bartender's chair. The expression of that priestly face fascinated Heathcote. It was that of a man who is the unwilling, enduring observer of something awful—a listener to the unspeakable.

Directly in front of Snubby was Liverpool. He was on his feet. Nevertheless, it could hardly have been said that he was standing. His knees were bent, his slab of a body twisted at the waist, his shrunken neck slanted grotesquely. He resembled a comically disabled jumping-jack.

In an extraordinary way, both Snubby and Liverpool were changed.

Now the bartender was no longer bold and brassy, nor fearlessly domineering. Gone from him was his impudence, and all his belligerent air. While that rough-skinned, flat face of his had lost its pasty look, and was a deep, mottled red, as if it had been scorched at a blaze—which had also seared away the horizontal wrinkles from his forehead. His yellow eyes had turned blue-black. Instead of talking out of the side of his mouth, he opened his lips wide. They frothed with rage at their corners. His strong teeth snapped. His big, full-chested body shook with fury.

The cockney, on the other hand, though he hung before Snubby in that half-crouched manner, showed no sign of wishing to fawn upon any one, to please, or to win agreement. His bowler was cocked saucily over one ear. His hands, he held up in front of him, honing one palm with the other. He was laughing—so hard that his face was lifted and shortened till he did not look pinched, or too old, but fuller; also, healthily tinged. And despite the laugh, his little eyes were open.

His tongue was out. It kept traveling all the way round that almost toothless mouth, its tip curling back to touch, now one cheek, now the other, next the end of his transparent nose, then, his chin. And as it circled, Liverpool sucked in his breath like a man who is tasting everything that is delicious; he swallowed, making the great Adam's apple dart up and down; he gurgled; he chuckled; he slavered.

"If I had jus' one hour!" Snubby was saying to him. "——, what wouldn't I do t' y'! I'd take y' t' pieces, joint by joint! I'd sizzle ev'ry inch o' hide offen y'!"

"Listen, mush-face!" Liverpool bantered back. "I'm a loafer, ayn't I? W'y, I miss bein' 'uman! I'm the scrapin's of a ship's sink, and the sink o' the fo'csle cook at that! Born a bum, too, and dirt under the feet of the third mate o' a coal-barge! And y'd love t' knock out me lawst tooth, wouldn't y'? Y've 'ad dog-pups y' thort more on, and——"

The commander interrupted.

"Stick to facts," he directed.

Emboldened by this reproof to Liverpool, Snubby addressed the officer—

"I've treated this snickerin' monkey better'n he's ever been treated in all his low-down life!"

The cockney's denial was firm. "You *never* treated me good. Y' never was me friend, real honest-like. Y' never give me a tanner that I didn't do somethink t' pye for't. Well enough y' knows that! A sup o' gin now and again, w'n y' thort I was 'andy for gossip, that ayn't good treatin'. You treated me vile, that's wot—callin' me nymes, and the like o' that!"

"I'm the only man on the island that's ever give y' a second look! I've fed y' on tick! Let y' kick 'round my place—a yellow-streaked, jungle-livin' squaw-man!"

Liverpool's long neck straightened proudly.

"Wot I am, I am. I don't go abawt makin' a better o' myself. I been a flunky all my life afore I come aboard this island. Now I'm livin' a nytive life, yus! But come to that, I ayn't never once so much as w'ipped me missus, much less let a knife into a poor, old w'ite lydy." Then, his deep eyes boring his antagonist: "But you! You've strutted this flamin' island in your walkin-abawt clothes, talkin' how you was keepin' the plyce clear o' criminals! 'I stand for the lawr!' you says. And I awsks y', now, 'Who are *you* to repersent the lawr!' Wot's the good o' pertendin' like you done! *You* ayn't no gentleman. But you tried t' fool me as you was. And that puttin' y'rself up in the world was wot harmed y' with me, old chum! that knows the best o' people—if only by sight. Me, that many's the time, in a P. and O. boat, has carved the joint for a lord o' England!"

"You turned a dirty trick on me!" charged the other hoarsely.

Liverpool shrugged.

"As for turnin' on friends," he retorted, "you've tipped the cutters t' many a poor —— of a sailorman who wished for t' git out o' a bad ship. *And* then, tyke it closer to 'ome: There's a certain party on Raragona that you planned t' turn over t' the cutter this trip. I'm namin' no blighted nymes, but y' wanted t' chuck 'im off the flamin' island, then tyke 'is plantation.

Yus! Y' cawn't think o' nothink but cheatin' folks out o' their property."

"Cheatin'!" Snubby bellowed. *"You* talk about cheatin', when what you're after is my business here! T' take over my place and my trade!"

Liverpool jeered the idea.

"Tryde nothin'! I'm no blasted shopkeeper, nor tap-man! I'm not a penny-chaser. For a few flamin' shillin's o' profit would I 'arm the nytives like *you* does?" Whereat that circle of golden-brown bodies moved, swaying, and black eyes darted knowing looks. " 'Arm 'em by fillin' 'em with gin when they needs their 'ard-earned money for kit, and things for their kids! Wot, me? Oh, no, thank y' kindly! I've no stomach for tryde, old chum. I'm on this island to squire it a bit, and tyke my particular ease!"

"No! Y' wouldn't keep a store, would y'! But y'd take blood-money!"

Liverpool made a gesture of abhorrence.

"All I thinks of," he answered, "is that Raragona 'll be better off from now on. But I awsks nothin' for myself. I don't want no crimson rewards."

"Jus' the same, you're behind this!" accused Snubby. "When the skipper here, come through my door, I seen you point your finger at me, and I heard y' say, 'There's your man.' "

"Give y' away? Right y' are there, me boy!" Liverpool's smile was as frank as it was joyful. "Wot's more, if y' likes t' know, it was me as *sent* for the *Quiapo.*"

"Liar!"

"Easy, easy!" cautioned the voice of authority.

"You heard from the *Tropic Express,*" resumed Snubby, "that a man——"

"I *told* the *Tropic Express,*" amended the cockney. "And this island 'eard abwat it becorse some bloke talked too much with 'is blinkin' mouth afore the schooner sailed aw'y. But 'oo but me was t' tell the commander 'ere wot chap 'e wanted? Come t' that, if again y' likes t' know, I'm the only one on Raragona wot knowed y' 'ad a scar on y'r 'ead."

At that, Snubby all but screamed.

"What's the scar got t' do with it?" he demanded. *"Sure,* I got a scar! What of it?"

"Wot of it? This of it. Oh, I been watchin' out for that bloomin' mark this good whiles! Couple o' weeks ago I 'appens t' come a-past this plyce w'en the moon was 'igh. You was asleep, old chum —snoozin' like a byby. Through the winda, wot did I see but the scar. And, 'Oh-ho!' says I t' myself. 'That's 'im!' "

Again Snubby addressed the officer:

"This snifflin' beach-comber's got a grudge against me. He's lyin' ! You ain't goin' t' take the word of scum like him, are y'? Jus' because I got a mark on my head? I'm not the man that's wanted! I swear I ain't! I——"

"Now wot's the good o' talkin' like that!" broke in Liverpool. And to the officer: "Wot I says, sir, I stands by. This gin-slinger's wanted by the police."

From a pocket he fished a folded and much-yellowed strip of paper, smoothed it out and proffered it.

"If you'll kindly look at this, sir. It's me h'evidence, sir. 'Ere's Snubby's pitcher, big as life! 'E's a ring-fighter, sir. And 'is ring-nyme's One-Jab Dawson. Y' can read all abawt 'ow 'e's wanted by the police of Chicago, America, for stabbin' a'old woman for 'er jew'lry, w'ich ayn't cricket, says I. I recognized 'is jib months ago. And I wyted me chawnce t' 'ave a peep at 'is nob. There's plenty abawt 'is scar, sir. Also a bit abawt 'is ears, w'ich got like they is from bein' punched in crooked fights, not from bein' froze in no snowstorm in Minnesota Province."

Now Snubby's face was as livid as the blemish dividing his thick, curly hair. His look focused on that printed paper, he licked at his dry lips—while Liverpool respectfully drew back an arm's length from the commander.

Presently, the latter raised his eyes and gazed keenly at Snubby.

"One-Jab Dawson, eh?" he said. "Well, Dawson, you proved you're a slugger when we ironed you. And I think this description is all I want." He folded it, then thrust it under the inner band of his cap.

Once more Snubby turned to his accuser.

"Don't be too sure I won't git out o' this trouble," he said quietly. "I ain't in Chicago yet, and I ain't been tried. If ever I am set loose, I'll spend the rest o' my life lookin' for you. And when I find y', I'll make you wish the cutter'd took *you.* If it's the last act o' my life, I'll settle with you for this. I'll——"

Liverpool waved a hand airily.

" 'Ark t' me, Mister Prize-Fighter," he said, grinning saucily. "No flamin' fear o' that! Knifed a' old lydy, didn't y'? W'en we meet once more, old chum, it'll be in ——!"

"You cockney whelp! You filthy stool-pigeon, makin' yourself solid with the police! You snitcher! You slime!"

"Never mind the billingsgate!" broke in the commander.

But Snubby was past hearing either commands or reproofs. His face as scarlet as before, his eyes glaring, his breath coming in gasps, he went on with his abuse—an unrestrained, almost incoherent, staccato of shocking obscenities.

He ended.

At the violence and vileness of the tirade, the *padre* had trembled. Now he lifted his pale, grave face till his sad eyes were upturned toward the shading branches overhead. Then his lips parted, and aloud, in Spanish, he prayed:

"Father of me, count not his blasphemy against him! He is ill of anger. He cannot know what his tongue speaks."

That pleading voice did not soothe Snubby. His naked chest was heaving. His head was drawn close to his stooped shoulders. His jaws were working, his teeth grinding and gritting.

Of a sudden, like a cobra preparing to strike, he reared himself, his torn shirt hanging about his hips, and raised both hands above his head. The light glittered on nickeled handcuffs. He struck at Liverpool with his manacled fists.

A dozen uniformed arms shot out to seize him. He was dragged back into his chair and pinned there. Then the commander rose.

"The boat," he directed.

As the circle of natives got to their feet, Heathcote took one step backward. It carried him past the corner of the building, and out of sight of that group. He turned round, entered the disrupted barroom, laid several Dutch gold pieces on a shelf behind the counter, and helped himself to three bottles of champagne, a tin box of candy, half a dozen cartons of sweet biscuits, and a large can of cigarets.

When he came out into the sunlight again, the *padre* was passing the door, walking slowly, with tonsured head bent. Heathcote uncovered and fell into step beside him.

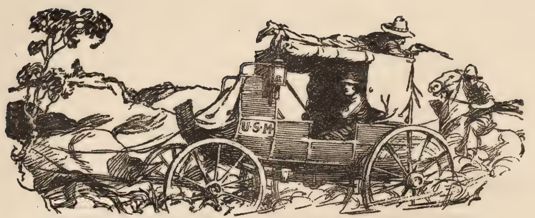
"Thees are onhappy day on Rar'gona," sighed the priest. "Ver' onhappy!"

"But even for sinners, *padre*, how beautiful! The air—I've never seen it so clear! And the birds! How they sing under the eaves of your church!"

A few moments later, as Heathcote left the palm-grove for the edge of the jungle, ahead of him, with a crackling and a snapping, some half-clothed figure suddenly sprang aside from the path.

It was Old Wreck Miller. He was headed in the direction of the trail which led to his hot tent. And he was running like a deer—bolt upright!

THAT night, on one far island in the Celebes Sea, six white men slept the sleep of peaceful security.



SIX-HOSS *and* STAR-FACE

by JOHN JOSEPH

Author of "The Smilin' Kid," "A Fool and His Fiddle," etc.

YOU fellas talk as if being a coward was just like havin' a silver dollar or answerin' to the name of "Smith." You've either got the dollar or you haven't got it; your name is either Smith or it ain't; a man is either a coward or he ain't, and that's all to it. Well, that's all right as far as the dollar and the name is concerned, but it's all wrong when you're thinkin' about cowards. There ain't but one kind of a silver dollar in circulation, and there's only one angle to the name of Smith. On the other hand, there's twenty-seven different kinds of cowards, and some of 'em ain't cowards at all when it comes to a show-down and the play comes up right.

You take the fella that's always sayin', "There, there, boys; don't let's have any trouble—there ain't really nothin' to fight about, anyhow." Well, it might be perfectly safe to spit in his eye; and then again it might not. The point is, you can't always tell.

For example, there was "Six-Hoss" Simpson. Used to hang out over around Porcupine camp quite a spell back. Six-Hoss was a queer sort of a cuss in lots of ways. Always carried two .45's, for instance—and was never known to use one. Dressed like a stage cowboy—cow-town hat, pink silk shirt, spotted silk handkerchief around his neck, buckskin pants, high heeled boots—to make himself look tall—and spurs. Spurs on a stage-driver all the time—and one that nobody ever seen on a horse—strikes me as bein' about the limit! He wasn't much to look at, being short and stumpy and weighin' under a hundred and forty—he's the kind that nobody'd ever give a second look if he had his trimmin's stripped off. He's a big feelin' little banty, at that, and he sure loves to show off and look pretty—with his pink shirt and spurs and all that.

He used to hang out around "Pop" Baldwin's Log Palace saloon when he was off duty with his two .45's strapped to his legs, and every now and then some stranger would blow in and size Six-Hoss up as a gun-fighter. Wearin' a gun was always more or less of an invitation to trouble; and wearin' two, with strings around your legs, was little short of a challenge—among gunmen. And so it happened that Six-Hoss sometimes got a chance to show. But he lays down every time. There was a streak of yellow in him a yard wide.

"Oh, ——!" he used to say, when somebody called him. "——, man! *we* ain't got nothin' to fight about; come on and have a drink."

The stranger would be suspicious, of course, and on his guard; but Six-Hoss has a smilin' way about him that always lets him down without a fight.

There might be better drivers than Six-Hoss—some place—but I never met up with one. Pro'bly a better man never strung a line over a six-hoss team in the West. But his team! That was where he held a way over all the rest, either at straight drivin'

"Six-Hoss and Star-Face," copyright, 1922, by John Joseph.

on the road or fancy work in a contest. He used to use three relays of stock in his daily trip from Porcupine to Elkhorn Flat and back, and one of these teams belonged to Six-Hoss himself. He was mighty p'ticular about his hosses—took him three years to collect the team I'm aimin' to tell you about. He'd discard a hoss for not liftin' his feet to suit him. He'd pass him up for not holdin' his head right, for shakin' his head too much, or for not shakin' it enough. Every hoss had to be just so, all around. Had to savvy his business and fit his place and know what Six-Hoss wanted better than he knew himself.

Six-Hoss don't care a whoop about color; he simply wants hoss, and all hoss.

"Bottom and brains and action," he used to say, "that's all to it; the rest you can build."

The wheelers are a pair of twelve-hundred-pound bays called "Tom" and "Jerry." As fine a team as ever chomped a bit. The off pointer was a red-roan—eleven-fifty—with two watch eyes, and smart as a collie dog. The nigh pointer was a buckskin with a black line down his back, and just a shade smarter than the roan.

They are a wise pair and no mistake. Had to be for Six-Hoss to pull off the stunts he did with 'em. Six-Hoss called them "Candy" and "Buck." The off leader was a shave-tail pinto named "Rock." He was an ugly brute—on account of his ratty tail—but that hoss didn't live that could get a foot over his single-tree on the road.

The nigh leader was the prize of the lot—good as they all were. He was a black, with a big star in his face and four white stockin's. His name was "Star-Face." Man! He was a beauty! And he had brains! Six-Hoss had him trained to do pretty much everything but talk. He had 'em all trained. Every one of 'em knew his business; knew what was expected—and done it—and the stunts Six-Hoss used to pull off with that team was something a fella had to see before he'd believe it.

And Six-Hoss sure thought a heap of that team. Nobody else ever watered 'em, or fed 'em, or drove 'em. Six-Hoss wouldn't stand for anybody layin' a hand on any of 'em. He kept Star-Face and Rock in a wide double stall and slept between them. Not just now and then, but all the time. Couldn't sleep no place else, he claimed.

THE fact that Six-Hoss is the biggest coward in the state is so well known that nobody ever say anything about it any more. But him and his team is a kind of an institution to the Porcupine folks, so they just smile, good-natured—like a fella does at a kid, you know—and let it go at that. All in all his reputation as a prize coward is so complete that nobody takes him serious or pays any attention to him as a man; he's just a thing in the shape of a man. A driver and a good one, but otherwise not worth a second thought.

Six-Hoss has got some good points about him, at that, but they're so completely overshadowed by his yellow record that he don't get any credit for anything. You take and put the yellow sign on a man, in this country, and that fixes him! Nothing makes a straw's difference after that; unless he wipes it off by doing something. If he's yellow, he's yellow, and that's all to it. He ain't fit for a decent man to associate with.

He has a pretty good income, on account of owning one of the stage teams and pulling down all the first prizes at the drivin' contests; he seldom drinks and never gambles; still he never gets ahead. He's too good-natured and free-hearted to hang on to his coin in a mining camp that's always got more or less broke men hangin' around. They all ride him, and slippin' a dollar here and four-bits there, every day, never built no man a bank account no place.

Six-Hoss don't know how to say no, in a case like that, and he don't ask you what you done with your Summer's wages before he digs. Which is more than can be said of a lot of folks that wouldn't look at Six-Hoss. If a man's hungry, he's hungry, and that's all to it; and what you done with your Summer's wages hasn't got anything to do with it. That's the way Six-Hoss looked at it, and if you fellas know the Big Book—that a powerful lot of folks read and mighty few follow—you won't have any trouble callin' to mind Another who had similar ideas.

Six-Hoss is always grinning, always trying to make a good fellow of himself, so he's the original "let George do it" guy for the whole camp. He's always runnin' errands and grinning about it and never gettin' anything for it, and he actually seems to like it. Everybody has a kind of a sneakin' liking for the cuss, but nobody dares to show it, and he hasn't got a real friend in the camp. That's just about the way it was with Six-Hoss, and I reckon every town on the map has got one pretty much like him.

Now there's a girl in camp, at this time, that everybody calls "Jay Bill's Annie." By guess she's a quarter-breed Indian, and—by guess again, old Jay Bill is her grandfather. They ain't talkin', but by their lingo they're from the big woods far to the north. Jay Bill takes possession of a deserted log cabin half a mile or so out of camp, and about all they've got to keep house with is a greasy roll of blankets, a rusty sheet-iron stove and a fryin'-pan. There's no women folks—just the old man and the girl—and where they come from, and why, is the camp mystery.

Old Jay Bill turns out to be a drunkard, and he's just about the filthiest, raggedest, low-down specimen of a two-legged human that ever a man laid eyes on. The girl is maybe twelve, and about as ragged and dirty as the old one. She runs around camp, barefooted and bareheaded and half-naked. She's tanned almost as black as her grandfather; her hair is a tangled mat of grease and dirt; she don't look more than half-human, and what few children there are in camp shun her like the plague or throw rocks at her and chase her out of camp.

They ain't in camp long till the girl makes up to Six-Hoss, and in less than no time they're thick as thieves. Six-Hoss is maybe thirty-five, and makin' up with a kid like that looked sort of odd; but somebody has said that misery likes company, and I reckon that not havin' any friends carries a sting all its own, and maybe a lot worse than some other things that people howl about. Anyhow they get to be great friends, and the girl spends a lot of her time foolin' around with Six-Hoss, helpin' him feed the prize team and leadin' 'em to water, and helpin' hitch up, and all that sort of thing. She's always there when Six-Hoss pulls out in the mawnin' and always waitin' when he comes back in the evenin', and every now and then she takes a trip to Elkhorn Flat in the stage.

WELL, by and by Six-Hoss wakes up to the fact that the girl ought by rights to be introduced to a bar of soap. He ain't exactly what you could call a fastidious cuss, himself, but he knows what soap is. So he buys a bar and takes the girl home and shows her and old Jay Bill how it operates on grease and dirt. Then he gives old Jay Bill a blowin' up that makes his hair curl, and winds up by tellin' the old cuss to clean up and cut out the booze, the penalty being if he don't do it Six-Hoss will sure as —— harvest his scalp.

Then Six-Hoss makes the rounds of the saloons and suggests quietly that they all stop sellin' booze to Jay Bill. And the strange part about it is that Jay Bill actually does quit booze and braces up and gets himself a job.

It seemed queer that he'd pay any attention to Six-Hoss, because "Nip Two" Allen has just come back after a couple of years sojourn up British Columbia way, where he learns all about Jay Bill and the girl, and he tells us that the greasy buckskin string hangin' around Jay Bill's neck has got a scalp hangin' to it, next to his chest, and that this scalp had once belonged to no less a person than Annie's father; the same being, during his lifetime, a dude from Montreal that couldn't see his way clear to doing the right thing by Annie's mother.

The story goes, too, that Jay Bill puts the fixin's to this guy, with a knife, after the guy gets two six-shooter bullets into him. Also, Jay Bill has got the name of bein' an all-around bad actor in the North country, so we don't make out how Six-Hoss gets the old cuss buffaloed this way.

A couple of weeks later Six-Hoss gets another idea. He borrows a pair of shears from mother Gann that runs the "Come Again" restaurant, and bobs Annie's hair and buys a comb and shows her how to use it. Then he buys her a dress and shoes and stockin's and sends her home to polish herself up. By and by he takes her around to Mother Gann and insists that she take the girl in and give her a home.

Now it happens that Six-Hoss has got something of a pull with Mother Gann, on account of chopping her wood and carryin' water and helpin' with the washin' and the like—which he needs the exercise, he says—but she kicks something fierce about *this* idea. She points out that she's havin' a hard enough time of it, bein' a widow and havin' an invalid son, and China restaurants to buck. Six-Hoss points out that the girl can help a lot with the work, that she needs a kind of attention that she'll never get from Jay Bill, and that he expects to pay her board besides. In the end Six-Hoss wins the argument, and Mother Gann takes the girl in.

Then Jay Bill, bein' lonesome without Annie, stops over and gets drunk. Six-Hoss takes him home; then he comes back and scouts around and finds out that Pop Baldwin sells him the booze. So Six-Hoss has a little confab with Pop, and after he goes out somebody asks Pop what it's all about. Pop grins and says that Six-Hoss has ordered him to cut out sellin' booze to Jay Bill. There's quite a crowd around, and there's a big laugh. Pop stands there with both hands on the bar, mouthing his cigar and lookin' across at the bunch, over his glasses.

"Yep," he says, when the noise dies down, "he ordered me, straight talk, to cut it out, and take it from me I'm gonta do it!"

The crowd roars again; Pop smiles his crooked smile.

"Yep," he says again, "I'm cutting it out. I seen something in that fellow's eye that I never saw there before, and I ain't lookin' for trouble. Not me! I've seen these easy-goin' grinners stirred up, a time or two, and I ain't lookin' for any of their game. Now listen, and I'll tell you something. You fellas have seen Six-Hoss doin' his stunts down at the shootin' range, and you know what he can do with a six-gun—peaceable. You know there's never been a man in this camp—barring maybe the Peets boys—that's got anything on Six-Hoss when it comes to gettin' a gun out of the leather plumb sudden and hittin' something when he turns her loose. So—if he ever starts—there ain't a man here that wantin' much of his game. You've seen him take water forty times, and you think he done it because he was scared. Well, maybe he did, but I'm getting another kind of a hunch. I've got a hunch that the reason Six-Hoss don't fight is because he's too good-natured. Nobody's ever got him *hot*, yet.

"Now listen! One of these days the play's going to come up right, and some of you fellas are goin' to look at Six-Hoss's grin through a right smart of smoke. And you ain't goin' to like it, because Six-Hoss is the guy that's goin' to be makin' the smoke!

"No, sir! A hornets' nest is a mighty tame-lookin' affair, but nobody ever uses a short pole to stir one up a second time. Once is a-plenty! And in this case there ain't goin't to be any first time. Not with me!"

Well, Pop has done some pretty good guessin' four-five times that we know about, and his little talk carries a right smart of weight, so what laughin' follows don't sound like it comes from very far down.

Then Jim Hoover, that runs the City Wood Yard, takes the floor and lets it out that for a long time he's been slippin' a load of wood over Mother Gann's back fence, every now and then, and, Mother Gann bein' too proud to accept it as a gift, he's been doin' it in the middle of the night, and Six-Hoss is the guy that pays for it. And that's one of the reasons why Six-Hoss has been cuttin' Mother Gann's wood, says Jim. With Six-Hoss choppin' the wood, Mother Gann don't pay any attention to the pile, and he can slip in a load now and then without her ever findin' it out.

Well, Six-Hoss' stock takes quite a jump, and we begin to get an inkling that maybe we've been sizin' him up wrong. This idea don't strike very deep, but it's there and ready to go deeper if there's any occasion for it. Still, we don't give him the benefit of the doubt; he's got to show his goods; then we'll pound him on the back and howl our heads off.

Annie improves wonderfully under her new management, and it ain't long till Mother Gann is callin' the girl "my Annie." She goes to school and helps with the work and gets prettier every day. Six-Hoss pays her board and buys her clothes for awhile, but old Jay Bill is workin' and keepin' straight, and by and by he takes over the job of supportin' the girl himself.

AND so it goes, and time rolls round, and Annie is sixteen. Mother Gann puts her in long dresses, and then we begin to realize that Porcupine camp is harborin' in its midst just about the neatest and sweetest and prettiest girl in the state. She sticks to Six-Hoss like he's her own daddy, and Six-Hoss is proud as peaches of the girl. Which is as it should be, Six-Hoss bein' the one that dug her out of the mire and started her and old Jay Bill on the right track and kept 'em there, while the rest of us reneged on the play and beat our own drums.

Jay Bill is still livin' in the same old cabin, and just for company he takes in another old Indian named Toomah. Toomah is a queer old cuss, and it's common talk around camp that he's entertainin' quite a passel of bats in his belfry. He's a full-blood, and he rassles a right smart with Injun medicine and spirits and the like of that.

How he finds things out is a mystery, but it's a fact that the old bat sometimes knows about things that happened away off somewheres, long before anybody else does. At the same time he's wild sometimes and tells tales about things that never could have happened. Not in this world, anyhow. All in all, nobody takes him serious or pays much attention to him, and that's how it come about that, when the time come and he had something worth while to tell, no body believed him and told him to toddle along home and bed down his bats.

Now then, along about here, Okanogan Charlie sets into the game. Okanogan is a bad actor, by all accounts; but he's a fast ramblin' party—here today and gone tomorrow sort, you know—and nobody knows much about him. His gang gets credit for all the hold-ups that's pulled off, from Nevada to British Columbia, but they never get anything on him, for sure. He covers a lot of territory and seldom works the same place twice. There's no telephones and you can't head him that way, so the only possible way is to follow him and trail him into the hills, and that scheme never works with Okanogan Charlie. He knows his ground, he's always well mounted, and besides that he's on good terms with the Indians. And a man is hard to corner if the Indians are coverin' his trail—as you-all prob'ly know as well as I do.

He's a dangerous man, is Okanogan. Partly because he's got brains, and partly because there's nothing that he won't do. Him and his gang robs a China placer camp, for instance—over at Freeman's Bar—and kills every man-jack—fourteen of 'em—just for sport. When that gang goes after coin or dust, the shootin' is done first, and the talkin'—if any—takes place afterwards.

Okanogan ain't what you could call a gun-man—that is, he never goes around lookin' for a fight. There might be glory in that sort of thing, for some folks, but not for Okanogan. Not that he was a coward—the cuss had sand, all right—but profits, not glory, was what Okanogan was after.

He's a good-lookin' cuss, and people says he plays the millionaire down in Frisco and back East and does a heap of swellin' around among the ladies. All this is what people says about him; as a matter of fact they don't know anything, and haven't got a thing on him—no time.

Okanogan hangs around camp for quite a spell, sizing up the situation, and after awhile he shines up to Jay Bill's Annie. In a gentlemanly sort of a way, of course—he's far too sharp to try anything else. Annie can't see him at all, but Okanogan—being a ladies' man—can't see why; so he keeps a-coming.

There's nothing of the hypocrite about the girl; she don't know how to pretend; she says what she thinks. And what she finally says to Okanogan must have been a-plenty—from the talk that went around. Okanogan passes it all off as a joke, however, and the camp soon forgets all about it. All but Okanogan. He don't forget, and the snubbin' he got from Annie must have rankled in his crop something fierce—judgin' by the final outcome.

THE trouble starts like this. The camp is pullin' off a fancy drivin' contest on a course they've got staked off on a level place about three mile out of camp. At the starting-place there's two posts set, just far enough apart so the stage can pass between 'em nicely, and maybe fifty yards beyond there's another set.

The second set ain't square with the first; you've got to make a short turn to get between the posts, and on the turn there's three-four big rocks you've got to dodge. There's maybe a dozen of these sets—strung out for a quarter of a mile—and one place there's a stretch of crooked ditch you've got to drive a-straddle of; and the least mistake puts two wheels in the ditch and over goes the stage.

There's five or six stage-drivers on hand with their outfits—boys from Elkhorn Flats and Freeman's bar, and on up the line. Pop Baldwin is master of ceremonies, and the whole camp is out to watch the fun. Nobody entertains any doubt about who's going to win first prize, so the interest all centers around the contest for second money.

There's a lot of good drivin', and some fun on the side when "Big Ed" Deever knocks down a post; then Tom Seeley from Elkhorn ditches his rig and rolls on the ground, bustin' a bottle of whisky he's toting in his hip pocket on the sly; but the big laugh comes when "Slim" Tate from Freeman's drops a line and his team does a four mile runaway everywhichway around in the sage brush.

Nobody makes the course faster than a trot, and finally Six-Hoss gets ready to wind up the show with the grandstand act of the day. He's all there—.45's, pink shirt, cow-town hat, spurs—everything. Six-Hoss looks ridiculous—but he's a driver and no mistake. And what a team! Man, oh, man! What a team! It brings a lump in a fella's throat just to watch them six hosses dash up to the startin'-line.

Pop fires his pistol, Six-Hoss yips at his team and away they go on a dead run—whip a-popping, dust a-flyin', pink shirt a-baggin' in the wind—and four riders gallopin' on each side and firin' their guns every jump. Everybody knows it can't be done. Not that way. It's impossible! And yet, someway, everybody knows that old Six-Hoss is goin' through. It's as pretty a sight as you'd want to look at—that six-hoss team draggin' that stage past all them hazards—on a dead run—and comin' out at last without a bobble. The crowd cheers like mad—old Six-Hoss is the hero of the day.

Well, it turns out that this contest is exactly what Okanogan is waiting for. He has his gang all ready, and while everybody is taking in the contest—except a few lone bartenders left behind to guard the booze and bank-rolls—they raid the camp and clean her up, clean as a whistle. Four white men and Mrs. Gann's China cook are killed in the raid. The cook bein' killed just for fun—when he sticks his head through a door to see what's goin' on.

They're all masked, of course, but there ain't any doubt about Okanogan bein' at the bottom of it. The whole camp turns out to hunt him, but hunting Okanogan in the wilderness of hills back of Porcupine is like divin' in the ocean for the fish that broke your line. Hosses is scarce, and the boys have plenty to do besides moonin' around in the hills lookin' for a gang of robbers that everybody knows they ain't ever going to find; so they give it up in a couple of days and go back to their sluice-boxes and gamblin' tables.

A COUPLE of days later a real he-bad-man shows up. We size him up for one of Okanogan's gang, but it's only a guess, at best, and so nothing is done about it. Well, we're right about it, as we find out later. The cuss is lookin' for information, and if we'd had any idea what he was after we'd have stretched him sudden!

He ain't lookin' for trouble—particular—but when Six-Hoss struts into the Palace, one evenin', pink shirt a-shoutin' and six-shooters a-shinin' and spurs a-jingling, it's too much for the stranger. I won't distress you fellas with the details; they're too painful. But what he done to Six-Hoss was aplenty. When she starts we have a sneakin' notion that maybe Six-Hoss is goin' to show, this time, and we're all on edge to see him do it.

But he don't; he takes water like a Mex sheepherder! The stranger tries to insult him by callin' him everything a fightin' man won't stand for, but Six-Hoss just grins and invites him to have a drink. But the stranger ain't dry, it seems. It suits him better to knock Six-Hoss' cigar out of his mouth. Then he slaps his chops and pulls his nose and makes him dance, and winds up by bootin' him out into the street.

It's tough to look at—in a way—at the same time it don't go a —— bit farther than what Six-Hoss has got a-comin'. We can't help feelin' sorry for the cuss, but we think it's goin' to do him good, so we're glad it happens.

But she don't work out like we figured it would. Instead of Six-Hoss puttin' his guns in cold storage and layin' off the strut stuff, it seems like he actually gets worse. We can't understand it. The cuss don't seem to have any sense! Don't seem to have the slightest idea about what is expected of a man! Even old Pop Baldwin shakes his head and says Six-Hoss is a yellow dog. We're plumb disgusted with the white-livered cur tryin' to get by with his puny stuff after getting called like that. Well, I've seen a lot of four-flushers in my time, but nothing like this! He's so —— near nothing that it makes me sick to look at him!

To get back to the stranger; we're leary of him, but he keeps his place pretty well—gamblin' a little and drinkin' a right smart and payin' for what he gets—and nobody gets an inkling of what he's really up to.

Then one day Mother Gann sends Annie over to Elkhorn Flat, and that night we miss the stranger. Annie is to be gone two days, goin' over in the mornin' and comin' back with Six-Hoss the next night.

Well, about two o'clock next day, old Toomah comes a boilin' into the Palace and tells us a wild tale about the spirits tellin' him that Okanogan is plannin' to hold up the stage on the Two Color hill, when it passes there at five o'clock this evenin'.

Holdin' up the stage *comin' in,* with an empty cash box, is so plumb foolish that we make a joke out of it and advise Old Toomah, like I said, to go home and comb his hair and bed down his bats. Old Toomah does his best, but the harder he tries the more we laugh. At last he gives it up and goes out, shakin' his head, and that's the last we see of him.

Along about five, somebody watchin' for the stage—it being a little late—sees Six Hoss' team tearin' down the hill towards camp, on a dead run, and half a minute later the whole camp is out in the street. Six-Hoss is a hard driver, but nobody ever saw him drive like this! They're a long mile away, but we can see that team's burnin' the road. They're roundin' the curves and tearin' down steep pitches on a dead run, and we know the devil's to pay, someway.

Well, here's about how she happens. Old Toomah steps into the road and stops the stage just before it reaches the summit. Six-Hoss stops, but he's a little late and he ain't in no frame of mind for listenin' to speeches comin' from a crazy old bat like Toomah.

Old Toomah is pretty wild this evenin'; he butchers the language something fierce, and Six-Hoss can't make out what he's tryin' to tell; so he cuts old Toomah off short and orders him to hop in the stage with Annie. Old Toomah piles in and Six-Hoss starts on up the hill, and by the time Annie has pried Toomah loose from his story they've passed the saddle and are headin' down the hill towards camp. Annie pokes her head through the door and tells Six-Hoss to stop, then she gives him the substance of what Toomah has told her.

The amount of it is, Okanogan and five of his gang are hid in the brush about fifty yards ahead, and they're aimin to hold up the stage. Old Toomah crawls out and stands blithering at Six-Hoss while Annie is talking, but Six-Hoss is listenin' to Annie and don't pay any attention to Toomah.

NOW, Six-Hoss has been held up maybe a dozen times going *out*, with somebody's dust aboard, but the idea of bein' held up comin' *in*, with no valuables aboard, strikes him as plumb foolish; and the idea of Okanogan being anywhere within a hundred miles, so soon after the Porcupine hold-up, and plannin' to rob an empty cash-box, at that, is nothing short of a huge joke. Six-Hoss treats himself to a big laugh, but Toomah is in dead earnest and keeps a-spielin', and by and by its leaks into Six-Hoss's head that Okanogan ain't after dust—he's after Jay Bill's Annie.

That idea brings Six-Hoss up a-standin'. If he'd had somebody's dust aboard, gettin' held up wouldn't have bothered him at all. He is used to it, and his way of handling a situation like that is simplicity itself. He just stops, when the order comes, and sets easy till the job is done. The way Six-Hoss figures it, he's hired to drive, not to fight; and the idea of makin' a fight for somebody else's dust is plumb childish.

Everybody knows Six-Hoss' views on this point, so the hold-ups always makes a joke out of it when they rob him, and don't even take the trouble to gather in his guns. Six-Hoss is a joke, so they give him the hoss-laugh and take what they want, and that's all to it.

But the girl is a different matter—according to Six-Hoss's lights. He ain't responsible for anybody's dust, you know, but he is responsible for the girl. That's the way it looks to Six-Hoss. He studies the matter over, but the prospects for keepin' the girl out of Okanogan's clutches are lookin' mightly slim. It ain't much use to try to dash a-past the gang—they'd simply shoot down a hoss, and that stops him right now. Likewise it ain't no use to turn around and start back; the gang is watchin' from behind the brush and rocks, and it bein' up-hill that way, they'd be on to him in a second. there ain't a chance any other way, so he finally decides to make a dash for it and trust to luck.

He orders old Toomah back in the stage, then eases off the brake and starts down the crooked, rocky, mile-long hill that leads to camp. And right there he starts the wildest ride that ever a human took in a stage, I reckon. About a hundred yards down the trail a lone rider steps his hoss into the road, maybe thirty yards ahead, and throws up his gun. Six Hoss is already swimmin' along at a stiff trot, and the instant he sees the hossman he yips at his team.

Now that team is trained a-plenty for quick starts, and in no time at all they're on a stiff jump and bearin' down on that hold-up like a cyclone. The hold-up tries to spur out of the road, but his hoss slips in the loose rock and mighty near falls, and before he can gather himself, old Star-Face hits him and hoss and rider goes down and under the wheels.

The stage mighty nigh upsets when it hits the hoss, but rights itself in time for one wheel to smash that hold-up's skull like an egg shell. This kind of a dash on the part of Six-Hoss is about the last thing the gang is lookin' for, so they're completely surprized and the stage gets clean a-past before a shot is fired.

They spur their hosses into the road behind the stage and open fire, but the stage hosses are protected now by the stage and Six-Hoss sees he's got a chance to get clean away.

The loose ends of the lines are tied to a ring on the back of the seat and can't get away, so Six-Hoss drops 'em and pulls a .45. And down the hill they go, the stage a-rockin' and a-rollin', over rocks and roots, the team on the dead run around sharp curves and down steep pitches—like the devil was after 'em; and the hold-ups a-comin' close behind and firin' every jump. Six-Hoss is hangin' on to the baggage-rail and shootin' back over the top of the stage, and payin' no attention to the team; and that prize-winnin' team is sure givin' the hold-ups a run for their money. Man! It was a sight worth seeing.

WE DON'T see the robbers at first—they're fair behind the stage, you know—but the stage presently makes a turn and we see the gang a-burnin' the wind behind. One rider reels and drops from his saddle, and the crowd yells. Okanogan is in the lead. He's lucky enough to get up close, without gettin' any of Six-Hoss's lead, then he does a leap and makes the boot on the back of the stage, turnin' his hoss loose. He's out of sight there; Six-Hoss drops his empty gun and pulls t'other one.

We know Annie's on that stage, but there ain't a —— thing we can do but watch 'em; half a mile away, now, and comin' like the wind, old Star-Face settin' the pace and makin' the turns just like old Six-Hoss was a-drivin' his best. About that time, Six-Hoss gets lucky and unloads two more of the hold-ups; then Okanogan sticks his head up over the top. Before he can duck back, Six-Hoss fires, and that's the last we see of Okanogan.

It's too hot for the lone robber that's left, so he checks up and rides into the brush. Six-Hoss hugs the seat, watchin' back for Okanogan, and that's the way they come into camp. Old Star-Face never swerves six inches from the regular trail up to the Pioneer Hotel piazy, and where they stop ain't a foot from the regular spot.

Six-Hoss turns around, slow and clumsy, like a man a hundred years old. He pulls a sickly grin and tries to get his hat off and make his regular grandstand bow, but his neck is too all-fired limber. He just sort of rolls half-around, like he's aimin' to get down regular; then his chin drops on his chest, and he grabs at the seat with both hands. Before any of us can get to him he rolls off the seat, and slips down feet first, limber as a watch-chain.

And just to show you what —— luck a man can have—one foot slips down inside the brake lever guide, his whole weight is throwed sideways onto it and the leg breaks with a pop that makes you sick to hear it. Hangin' that-a-way by his foot, his head strikes the boards with a bang, then a whole gallon of blood poured out from inside his shirt and splashed on the walk.

We got him down as quick as we could and laid him out on the walk. Annie is out of the stage, by this time—she'd come through the fight without a scratch—and she shoves us all away and throws herself down on Six-Hoss like he might be her own daddy. Doc Porter is there in about a minute and pulls the girl away; she gets up cryin' and wringin' her hands.

Doc looks Six-Hoss over for a spell, then shakes his head and says he's done for—that he ain't got a chance. By and by we carry him into the hotel and lay him on a bed, and doc goes to work, with Annie to help. The dining-room and piazy are jammed with people; all talkin' at once, of course. We can't think or talk about anything but Six-Hoss. The biggest coward on the map has wiped out the Okanogan gang—single-handed!

After a while Annie comes out and says Six-Hoss has got five slugs in him, and a broken leg, but doc says he's got a chance. There's a cheer; then Annie tells us all about it. There's another cheer, four times as big as the first one; then doc pokes his head out of the door and tells us to beat it and do our hollerin' over at the Palace—or someplace out of hearin' of Six-Hoss that ain't in no shape to appreciate it.

We surge off the piazy and examine the stage. Poor old Toomah is layin' dead inside, and Okanogan, shot square in the throat, is layin' crumpled up in the boot—dead as Cæsar. We unhitch the team and put 'em up, and if ever a team got a feedin' and a curryin' and a proper beddin'-down and rubbin'-down, that team got it that night. No other team that ever straightened a trace could have brought that stage down that hill on a dead run, with a good driver hold of the lines—much less without any driver at all.

Well, doc's last guess was better than the first and Six-Hoss finally got well, though he lost a leg and never drove a stage again. And that, boys, is why there's a feed and a bed, and a drink and a clink of coin for Six-Hoss, any place and any time; and why he's got more friends and less enemies than any other man in the Northwest.

No, you can't always tell; and before you spit in a fella's face, look him over—keerful. That's my advice.

SAILOR'S FAREWELL

by Gordon Seagrove

WE'D just made port from Liverpool, an' the ship was put to bed
When, "What do you want for Christmas, Bill?" the skipper up an' said.
(A bucko 'e was for marlin-spikes and bashin' on the head.)

"I s'pose you'd like a blue boudwar, an' a bed of ivory white
An' a nigger boy to bring you grog and tuck you in each night,
You Cape Horn fever-river scum, you wretched Frisco blight!"

"Well, captain," Bill says, slowly-like, "since I 'ave drawed my pay,
And I am goin' overside, I guess I'll 'ave my say
And tell you what would fill my 'eart with j'y this Christmas Day.

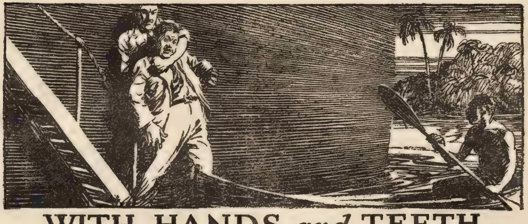
"First off, I'd like an 'ealthy swing to muss your ugly face,
An' second—knock them ugly teeth completely out of place;
Then dress you down with turpentine an' 'ang you from the brace.

"You rode my wagon round the 'Orn, an' give me wormy stew,
You dealt out shoddy underwear till I was freezin' blue,
An' many a cuff you sent my way—so 'ere is one for you!"

Then Bill he clipped the skipper's nose and put it out o' use;
The mean red blood ran out of it like water from a sluice,
An' next he knocks the skipper down in his own tobacco juice.

"You blue-nosed Yankee squid," says 'e, "I'm timid or I'd lay
Your carcass out like 'Amburg steak, but all that I can say
Is, 'Merry Christmas, Captain Jones, an' a jolly New Year's Day!' "

An' over the side 'e went with a skip
To sign up on an easy ship.



WITH HANDS *and* TEETH

by ROBERT SIMPSON

Author of "The Tenth Man," "Red and Yellow," etc.

THE things that men desire when they have not looked upon a face of their own color in many months are frequently as simple as they are oftentimes strange and sometimes terrible. And the man himself is no guide at all to that which may be expected of him.

Psychologists, for instance, could possibly have dissected Langton's case without any trouble. They would have proved, simply and concisely, that there was nothing in the least extraordinary in the thing that he did. But no one who knew Langton would have paid much attention to them; particularly Grant.

At Coribi, on the Rafka Creek of the River Ose, which flows through the Benin country into the land of the Kukuruku, Langton was alone. He was in charge of a mahogany concession up there—in West Africa's fever-country—and his job was to send down logs for shipment at Benin River.

He had been ordered up to Coribi to fill the shoes of a man named Starret, who had been carried down to Siluko in a hammock one cold and misty harmattan morning. Starret's body was alive, but his mind, for the nonce, at least, was dead.

The loneliness at Coribi had been too much for him, and when, without any assistance from alcohol, he had begun to see and hear and feel things that were neither human nor divine, he concluded, without knowing that he came to any conclusion, that it was time he went away from there.

Grant, who was Marsden & Co.'s agent at Siluko, listened to Starret's babblings and sent him down to Forcados and the steamer for home. From Grant's point of view, Starret's experience was an old one, and he said nothing to Langton about it when the latter passed through Siluko on the way north.

Grant did not like the sound of Langton's laughter. It held a derisive quality that exasperated and, as if to match his strong, white teeth, there was an intangible suggestion of cold-blooded deviltry in it that did not encourage any one to become confidential. Grant also doubted if Langton were the right man for so lonely and unrestrained an assignment as Coribi. He looked like a man whose impulses were not to be trusted, and his deep black eyes suggested almost any possibility.

Apparently, however, Langton found the bush-bound loneliness at Coribi entirely to his liking. There were no complaints. The carriers who came down to Siluko each month for the pay-roll and supplies were perfectly satisfied with Langton and the kind of discipline he preserved.

Log rafts floated down to Benin River in regular succession, and, freed from all restraint and interference, the complete master of all that he surveyed, Langton's record at Coribi was so exemplary as to be almost humdrum.

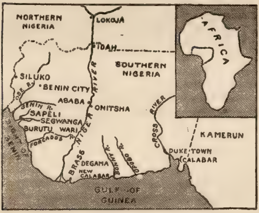
Obviously, he had the whole situation, including himself, completely in hand, and seemed prepared to go on indefinitely.

"With Hands and Teeth," copyright, 1923, by Robert Simpson.

Then, without any warning sign of fear or restlessness or disruption among the native gangs throughout the concession, or any of the usual indications that preceded all similar happenings, Langton stepped into a canoe after dinner one evening and, accompanied only by a single paddle-boy and an inconsequent tin trunk, disappeared down Rafka Creek in the general direction of Benin River.

This much Grant learned from a runner sent down to Siluko by one of the colored overseers on the Coribi concession. But that was all.

THE stern-wheeler *Kwali*, bound for Forcados from Lokoja and Zungeru, churned past Langton without so much as a gesture. She had her usual complement of homeward-bound passengers on board, and as they were at that moment almost within hailing distance of the *Sapeli*, no one had eyes for anything so insignificant as a canoe that loitered in the shadow of the bush, waiting just a little impatiently for sundown.



The *Sapeli* was lying at Forcados and would sail for home the following forenoon. Just then she was the center of attraction for two branch boats, several launches and canoes, and presently, of the *Kwali*, which did not go alongside, but transferred its passengers by launch or gig.

Langton was not near enough to detect the identity of any one of the *Kwali's* contribution to the *Sapeli's* passenger list. Which was just as well, or there would probably have been no story to write. He had arrived within sight of his goal half an hour or so earlier than he anticipated, and was compelled to linger in the shelter of a blind little side creek until darkness came.

After that, with the possible exception of a few whispered words to the *Sapeli's* chief steward, his appearance on the ship's promenade deck and in the dining-saloon would be as normal as that of any other passenger.

Perhaps he was not altogether satisfied with the result of the shave he had indulged in. Shaving in a canoe without a mirror is not reliable, but a visit to the ship's barber would make that all right, and the white flannels he wore were almost immaculate. He had not worn them when he left Coribi, and he knew if he had to remain too long in the canoe, their spotless perfection would not be quite so spotless. Therefore his impatience for darkness to fall.

And then, with the friendly suddenness of the tropics, it came.

"All right, Dubla," he said to the boy who accompanied him. "We go."

Dubla grunted and his paddle stabbed the water as a matter of course. In a few minutes, Langton was going leisurely up the *Sapeli's* companion ladder, and Dubla was drawing off into the dark again.

No one paid any more than the most perfunctory attention to Langton when he stepped on deck. A steward approached, made a remark about baggage, nodded when Langton murmured something about "just visiting," and drew away to watch for the arrival of more profitable business.

Langton passed on; found the chief steward who was perfectly agreeable to assigning a seat at table for Langton at dinner. This attended to, Langton sought out the ship's barber and put the finishing touches on the job he had started in the canoe, adding a hair trim and shampoo so that the business would be complete.

Then he strolled up on deck again.

GOING up the companion stairs, Langton thought the voice was familiar. It was rather more than a year since he had heard that voice, but he had ample reason to remember the sound of it, and when he heard the same, querulous, complaining note—more stressed than ever, Langton thought—he hesitated sharply and his deep black eyes, for a second or two perhaps, showed a decided trace of irritation.

The woman in the case had nothing to do

with this. He knew he was not in love with her—had not given her more than a passing thought since he had last seen her—and if he had any regret that so much fineness should be wasted upon the man whose name she bore, it was only because he had detested that man so thoroughly.

They had been fellow passengers on the way out from Liverpool more than a year before. Major Grailie and his wife, who was at least ten years younger than her husband, had been bound for Northern Nigeria on a shooting expedition. Evidently they were now on their way home again, and whatever luck the major had had, it had not improved his disposition or his manners.

As far as Langton was concerned, the thing began at a poker game somewhere between Las Palmas and Sierra Leone. Langton had played with the major just once. After that he had done his best to avoid him, but had been compelled, during a game of shuffle-board, just off Accra, to ask the major to mind his own business. Grailie had argued about it, of course, and had become furiously and profanely angry with a callow young trader's assistant who had had the bad taste to laugh at him.

Whereupon Langton had informed him that the young man was perfectly justified since he, the major, was "really quite a good joke."

For some reason that Langton had never fathomed—not that he had bothered very hard to try—this inglorious, inconsequent remark had silenced the major as effectively as an upper cut, and for the short remainder of the voyage, Langton frequently found himself being watched by Grailie with slant-eyed suspicion.

He stepped out on deck, now, with an assumption of indifference. He was not afraid of Grailie, but he was disturbed about the possibility of having his plans interfered with by any untoward event.

And the major was the kind of man who bred unpleasantness. He invited primitive forms of argument as molasses invites flies. Whereas, Langton, though Grant of Siluko had not suspected it, was a punctual and punctilious man, who timed everything he did as carefully as he sometimes timed his punches.

The up-to-the-minute fashion in which he had handled the lonely Coribi concession proved this, and even when he did go off at a tangent, as in this case, there was nothing wild-eyed or haphazard about the undertaking. His spotless white flannels, which had no kinship with fear-shattered nerves or precipitate flight, was his badge of self-control and ultra-respectability. Langton liked to be respectable, and it was not good to compel him to forget himself.

He made no effort to avoid Grailie, neither did he seek him out. They were bound to encounter each other at dinner, and Langton preferred, if there was to be any unpleasantness, that it would take place on deck rather than in the dining-saloon.

Above all else, he was not going to have his dinner interfered with.

He moved up the deck toward a cluster of lights and a string of deck-chairs, paying no visible attention to Grailie or to his peevish opinion of the cocktail the deck steward had brought him. But in the first half-minute, watching the major and his wife out of the corners of his eyes, Langton knew that there had come a change—a change for the worse.

As they were seated directly under the cluster of lights, Langton saw them both quite plainly. The major looked flabbier than ever. Fever had put a hectic look in his eye and a still more unpleasant rasp upon his tongue. There was a florid brutishness in his face—a blatant sense of power which he would not hesitate to use in any fashion that pleased him.

And his wife looked as if she understood exactly what this could really mean when the major wanted to make it all perfectly clear.

She sat back in her deck-chair, leaning away from Grailie as if she did not want, at any time, to be any nearer to him than she could help. There was a dull look of hopelessness in her blue-gray eyes and, obviously, she had stopped being amused by anything pertaining to the man. Her air of quiet reserve was gone. She was pretending no longer. In a voiceless, colorless kind of way, that was exemplified by the tropical pallor in her cheeks, she hated Grailie and did not seem to care who knew it.

Her eyes were fixed on a point, straight ahead, that approximated Langton's waistline as he passed. Then she looked up and her eyes widened sharply and her hand went up to her mouth as if to stifle an involuntary cry.

Langton went right on. The major, still bullying the steward, was too busy to pay any attention to his wife, but when the steward, mumbling apologies, hurried away, Grailie chanced to glance in Langton's direction as the latter strolled up the deck.

He could not see Langton's face, but something about Langton's walk and the broad of his shoulders, struck a responsive chord of memory, and the major turned sharply toward his wife.

"Who is—what are you staring at?"

"I—nothing, Roger," weakly, as if she knew that she was beaten and that there was no more fight left in her.

"Isn't that that fellow Langton?"

"Langton?" in a small voice and with a hopeless assumption of ignorance and forgetfulness.

The major's eyes became mere slits and the bloated red in his face paled perceptibly.

"You saw him," gruffly.

"Why should I pretend not to, if I did?"

Mrs. Grailie sat a little straighter in her chair, just the faintest suggestion of life and dignity showing in her eyes.

The major turned his attention to Langton again, and watched in sullen anticipation until Langton turned to come back. Then Grailie's huge body stiffened. His hands clenched on his knees, and he looked toward his wife.

"You told him we were sailing on this ship."

It was not a question but a statement of fact. And it took no thought of any of the other passengers, all of them men, who happened to be occupying some of the deck-chairs near at hand.

Several of these men turned their heads at the accusing tone in Grailie's voice, and two or three of them, who had come down from the north on the *Kwali* with the major and his wife, knew what to expect. The Grailies were quarreling again; or rather, the major was once more putting his wife in her proper place, and this time, evidently, it involved a third party, and promised some real excitement.

"*I* told him!" Mrs. Grailie murmured hopelessly. "You don't know what you are saying."

"Of course, you told him. Coincidences like that don't just happen. They're arranged."

He got slowly out of his chair.

"All right," he continued. "We'll settle it in the first minute and then there won't——"

"Roger!"

Mrs. Grailie jumped to her feet, tried to catch at her husband's arm, but he threw her hand off with a brutish imperiousness that spun her away from him several feet, then went straight toward Langton.

"Roger, please!"

Some of the other men rose from their chairs, looking as if they ought to do something, but did not know just what, and before they could come to a decision on the matter, the issue between Langton and the major was joined.

Langton stopped strolling when Grailie was about two yards away. He had one good look at the major's face, and this was sufficient to inform him that Grailie was going to be just as unpleasant as he possibly could. A glimpse of Mrs. Grailie confirmed this beyond a doubt. She had paused a few feet behind the major, a little to his left, and her mouth was open as if she were getting ready to scream. But she did not scream, nor move in any way, and in her eyes there was a vague hint of a quizzical anticipation Langton had seen in them before; a timid hopefulness he did not pretend to understand.

Grailie stopped, too, looked Langton up and down with a bloated sneer, then said with a heavy kind of facetiousness—

"We can't lose you, Langton, can we?"

"Hello, major," with a quiet smile. "You look annoyed about something. What is it?"

"What are you doing on this ship?"

"Enjoying myself. Why?"

"Do you suppose, for one minute, I'm going to travel on the same ship with you for three weeks, and let you think you're pulling the wool over my eyes?"

Langton laughed. It was the laugh Grant of Siluko did not like, and Langton's eyes receded so that no man might know what he was likely to do next.

"Personally, Grailie, I think you are a fathead, but as there isn't much hope of convincing you of the fact, let's forget about it and shut up."

Some one snickered. Grailie's eyes flamed.

"—— you! What do you mean? Do you think I'm going to be the laughing-stock of the ship——"

"You're that now."

"While my wife and you carry on your confounded——"

"Roger!"

"—peccadillos under my eyes!" he finished, ignoring her appeal.

Langton's mouth drew down a little and his right hand closed and opened again, but that was all. He saw something of the expressions on the faces round about, and Mrs. Grailie's face was a study in pathetic apology, but whatever was expected of him he did not oblige.

The proper thing to do would have interfered with his dinner.

"What you need, Grailie," he said conversationally, "is medical advice. If you'd just be a nice fat man and sit down and behave yourself, we'd all feel a great deal more comfortable. You're a nuisance, you know, when you go on like this."

There was more than a snicker this time. Even Mrs. Grailie smiled and stood a little straighter, tensed, looking at Langton as if she did not believe he were possible.

Grailie sputtered. He was too angry even to use his ham-like hands coherently, and the sudden grab he made for Langton's shoulder missed it by almost a foot. Then some of the other men, as if actuated by a simultaneous impulse, closed in about the major, gripped his arms and held on to him, telling him to keep his temper and shut up, while he swore without stint and threatened Langton with dire penalties and punishments.

Langton paid no heed to these, and one of the ship's officers appearing on the scene, settled the matter for the time being, without much ceremony.

To every one except Mrs. Grailie, the thing had become something of a joke, even if they knew it could not end there. To the major's wife, however, it was nothing short of tremendous though the climax she had hoped for had not happened.

LANGTON'S attitude of mind as he went down to dinner, was selfish in the extreme. What Grailie might have to say to his wife, or what the ship's company chose to think about the affair, troubled him not at all.

With a singleness of purpose that was almost impossible under the circumstances, Langton took his place at the table to which he had been assigned, giving his table companions tacitly to understand that he had nothing on his mind just then but food.

That there was a great deal of whispering round about him and that Grailie was seated directly opposite, at another table on the other side of the saloon, did not seem to interest Langton in the least.

He moved down the menu with a studied deliberation that betrayed nothing at all until he came to the dessert. There, he cast deliberation aside and said simply and without looking at the menu—

"An apple, please."

The table steward brought one, and Langton cut and ate it; at first, with a kind of sublime anticipation in his face and then with a decided expression of growing restlessness and dissatisfaction. Obviously something he had confidently expected was missing, and after thinking about it a minute or so, he said to the steward in a low, rather hesitant voice—

"Bring me another apple, will you?"

The steward complied, and Langton, carefully cutting the apple into four quarters, as before, ate it after the manner prescribed by the best authorities on table manners.

And his face, as he ate, slowly darkened.

When he ordered his coffee, he did so bruskly, and completely ignored something one of his table companions—a doctor from Jebba—wanted him particularly to hear. Ere he rose from the table his *sang froid* had departed, and he glanced across the saloon once or twice in Major Grailie's direction, as if he were seriously thinking of placing the blame there.

When he went up on deck again, he went alone; smoked several cigarets in rapid succession as he paced up and down the most solitary part of the deck he could find, then came to a halt beside a lifeboat and leaned against the rail watching the few winking, far-scattered lights of Forcados with a sulky irritation taking deeper root in his black eyes every minute.

And it was there that Mrs. Grailie found him. She came to Langton's side so quietly that she startled him, and when he saw who it was, his mental processes of the moment were not of the kind to be soothed by conversation on the subject of Major Grailie.

"He's playing cards," the major's wife announced quickly in a low voice, to assure him that Grailie was safely out of the way, for the time being. "And I thought I'd like you to know that I'm terribly sorry about—about what happened. Perhaps—oh, I know I needn't apologize to you, because you understand him so well and know just how to speak to him when he's like that. But if we are going to travel together, in such cramped quarters, for three whole weeks——"

"We're not going to do that," Langton said, and tried not to attach any of the "blame" to her. "I'm going up-river again tonight."

"Tonight!" blankly. "You're not sailing with us!"

Langton had a chance to study her more closely then while he shook his head, and she gazed rather stupidly up at him. She was pretty and had been much prettier before she had gone up into the lonely wilds of Northern Nigeria with the major. Up there, as it looked to Langton, the major had beaten out of it most of the life that had been in her face; and Langton was not at all sure that some of the pounding he had in mind was not of the literal sort.

Just then her large, blue-gray eyes were showing quite plainly that she was sorry he was not going to travel on the same ship with her. In fact, he had to repeat several times that this was the case before she would actually believe it.

When she did, her expression became cold.

"Why didn't you tell him that when he spoke to you?" she asked as if she had a grudge against him for not doing so.

"It was none of his business."

"No, I suppose not." A pause. "Good night, Mr. Langton."

"Good night, Mrs. Grailie."

She walked quickly away from him half a dozen steps, stopped, moved off another few steps, stopped again, paused, and then wheeled toward him sharply, reaching his side once more with a speed that was rather startling.

"Can't you just—just go along the coast a bit? Just a few days?"

"Why?"

"Can't you? Surely, that isn't't——"

"I'm sorry," Langton declared simply. "And I'm afraid I don't understand in any case. I should think my presence on board would make it desperately uncomfortable for you."

"No," sharply. "He's afraid of you. He won't admit it, but I know he is, and he hates you enough to kill you if he ever got a chance. If he knew you were on board he would be afraid to—to hurt me for fear I would tell you about it."

Her voice had fallen away to a whisper, and Langton stared a little, even if most of her confession was no surprize to him.

"But why should he think you would tell me?"

The look of pathetic apology Langton had seen in her face earlier in the evening, came into it again, augmented by a nervous apprehension that suggested only too pointedly what the past year had done to her. Langton knew, without being told anything about it, that beyond the Benue, things had happened which she would not be likely to tell to any one.

"When you said—you remember, coming out, you said he was really quite a good joke?" she asked in a whispery voice.

Langton nodded.

"Not long before that—just before we left England—I told him almost the same thing, and he thought I must have put you up to repeating it. He was sure, after you said it, that we—well, you heard what he had to say this evening—and I—I never argued with him about it. I let him think what he pleased because it irritated him so terribly."

Langton did not pretend to understand this and looked it.

"But I should think his irritableness would make things——"

"Not then. Not before we went up there. You see, I wasn't afraid of him then. I just hated him, and—and I liked to watch him squirm whenever your name was mentioned."

Langton laughed softly, though it was no laughing matter. There was tragedy in the eyes of the woman before him; a blank stare that, when one began to get a glimmer of understanding, was appalling. But Langton laughed because her attitude toward Grailie so closely approximated his own.

"But why—" Langton knew the question was inquisitive but he simply had to ask it—"did you go up there with him, alone, if you felt like that?"

Mrs. Grailie smiled. And Langton did not want to see any one smile like that again, particularly a woman as pretty and fine as she had been.

"I planned it," she said simply.

"You! Good Lord!"

"It sounds funny now, doesn't it? But as I've said, I wasn't afraid then. I thought I could—could break him or kill him up there, and—" she stopped, then added very quietly—"well, I'm afraid, now."

Her mouth twisted as if she appreciated in full the sardonic significance of the final three words.

Langton lighted a cigaret, watched a shadowy figure, which proved to be that of a deck-hand, suspiciously, for a minute or so, and tried at the same time to come to some kind of decision on the matter. He was sorry for the woman, of course; all the more so because her manner of telling her story did not express any desire for sympathy, or any expectation of a real understanding of how pitifully she had failed.

When she looked at him, there was no admiration in her eyes, no sentiment, and it was painfully plain that, though she was not whining, she needed protection of some sort; something that would give her a chance to regain her old grip upon herself, if that were possible.

From her point of view the situation, particularly on board ship where every one could hear and see so plainly, was acute beyond words. From Langton's angle the thing was, bluntly, a nuisance. It had spoiled his whole evening—particularly the dessert.

He had traveled the better part of three days in a somewhat leaky canoe—had deserted his job, and had anticipated luxuriously, only to have a sodden brute like Grailie interfere and upset everything.

He made no pretense of being a hero, and had little or no sympathy with knight-errantry. Therefore he knew at once that it would be impossible for him to remain on the *Sapeli* and take a jaunt up the coast as Mrs. Grailie suggested. First, because he needed his job in spite of the liberties he had already taken with it, and second, being a man who liked to be respectable, he had no intention of becoming involved in any one's domestic difficulties—no matter how tragic.

But if there was any way in which he could discuss with Grailie his own grievance against him without appearing to do so on behalf of the woman——

Langton liked the thought. This was so plain that Mrs. Grailie, looking up at him quickly, asked—

"You'll stay?"

"No, I can't do that. But if you'll leave the major to me, I'll see what I can do before I start up-river."

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Does that really matter so long as you get a chance to pull yourself together?"

"But——"

"And I don't think, if I may be permitted to express an opinion, that you are as afraid as you imagine," Langton offered quietly. "You'll know what I mean when you reach home and see a lamp-post and a policeman on every corner. Just now you're ragged, full of fever and the effect of long, dark nights miles away from——

"Don't!" she pleaded pitifully.

"Just so." Langton smiled. He had not been up at Coribi alone for six months for nothing. "I'll see what I can do."

"But won't you tell me——"

"I'm not at all sure myself yet," Langton admitted. "But, at all events, I'll try to assure you of a pleasant voyage and, if possible, the chance to get away from him if you want to take it. Would you take it?"

"Run—run away from him, you mean?"

"None of my business, of course," Langton said in a low voice. "But if the chance ever comes, you'd better skip out. You'll get over it, you know. He never will." A pause. "Good night, Mrs. Grailie."

"I wish you would tell me—I mean, couldn't I——"

"No. You can't appear at all. This is strictly my affair. I don't like your husband, Mrs. Grailie. I never did. And I think I'd like to tell him so in my own way. That's all."

"Oh," blankly, and then with a shaky smile—

"Good night, Mr. Langton."

LANGTON bowed and watched her turn and move slowly away, hesitating every few steps as if she would come back again to satisfy her perfectly natural curiosity. But she finally disappeared around the corner of a deck-house, and Langton followed leisurely, dipping down the companionway in search of the chief steward.

When he had talked with him a few minutes, some money changed hands, and Langton climbed to the deck again in possession of a good sized bulky paper bag. He carried the bag to the head of the companion-ladder, peered down into the dark below and saw that Dubla, his canoe boy, had brought the canoe alongside according to instructions.

Langton delivered the bag into Dubla's keeping, and then, having disposed of this important preliminary, went deliberately in search of Major Grailie.

He found the major in the smoking-room, playing poker with three others who did not seem to care who they played with so long as the money was real. It was not a nice game, and the major's companions seemed to like it for that reason. Two of them were in the Public Works Department, and the other was a hatchet-faced trader from Warri, who was losing steadily and becoming chronically slant-eyed as a result of it.

A goodly number of interested spectators were grouped about the table when Langton went in, so that the major was not aware of his presence until several hands had been played. Then, on the verge of asking for cards, Grailie looked up uneasily and saw Langton's eyes fixed steadily upon his face.

Langton did not smile or scowl or show any emotion whatever. He just looked. And the major's mouth opened, and every one who happened to be looking in his direction, anticipated a flow of vituperation in keeping with his expression. But his mouth slowly closed again, his eyes began to shift and the red of his face became paler every second.

"I'd like to talk to you—outside," Langton said simply enough; so simply that everybody gaped, and the major's poker companions were too astonished to protest the interruption of their game.

"What for?" the major blustered heavily, but every one knew it was only a bluff, and that, for some reason that was not at all clear on the surface, he would do exactly as Langton desired.

"Play out this hand," Langton conceded generously. "I'll wait for you."

Then he passed out on deck again and waited for the major to join him.

Presently, amid a hush that asked a score of bewildered questions, Grailie came out of the smoking-room alone. He walked with a sullen, heavy step, wearing an expression of grandiose bravado that was not very convincing. He found Langton leaning against the rail near the head of the companion ladder.

"Well?" he demanded, first glancing behind him to be sure that no one had followed.

"Did you win much?" Langton asked, as if he were just mildly interested.

"What the —— has that——"

"Sh!" Langton cautioned softly. "Don't bluff so loudly. That third ace, in the hand before the last one—where did you get it?"

The major bristled and swelled, and his fat hands tried to say what his tongue could not. Langton brushed the pawing hands away with amazing ease and added:

"I played with you once, you know—just once. Remember?"

Grailie did. He remembered, too, how abruptly Langton had stopped playing on that occasion. But he had never been sure —though he had been afraid—of the reason. There was something of the pricked balloon in his manner now, as he blustered more desperately than ever.

"What are you driving at? —— you! Are you trying to insinuate——"

"I have a canoe at the foot of the companion-ladder," Langton informed him mildly. "And I'm going up-river immediately. For your hide's sake, I'd think you'd better come with me."

"Eh?"

Some one passed up the deck, and Langton allowed Grailie to gape until the stroller was out of hearing.

"That'll be the best way. Those fellows in there," and he indicated the smoking-room with a jerk of his head, "wouldn't be a bit pleasant about it, if I told them, and, of course, I can't let you off a second time."

This sounded convincingly moral even to Langton, who did not care in the least about the "fellows in there" if they were fools enough to lose their money by playing with a man like the major. But, by referring to them, the woman in the case was conveniently left out, and Langton was given an opportunity to be quite respectable, and at the same time eminently just.

"You're not going home!" the major managed to ejaculate when he got his breath again. "You're not sailing on this ship!"

"No. I'm going right back to Coribi, and I think you'd better come with me. The trip'll do you good."

"No!" Hoarsely. "I won't. You're talking rot. You can't prove——"

Langton moved away from the rail in the direction of the smoking-room without a word.

"Wait!"

Langton stopped, turned and came back.

"All right. Let's go."

Grailie hesitated, floundering mentally and physically in a morass of doubt and fear. His huge body was shaking like a mass of jelly, and once, his hand slunk over his hip-pocket telegraphing his intention to Langton so loudly that he could almost hear it.

"Don't do that," Langton advised softly, and it might have been observed that his right hand, though open, had a slight crook in the fingers, and that his eyes were accurately measuring the point of Grailie's jaw. "You'll only make a fool of yourself."

"Good God! Are you mad! My wife—what will they all think? A man can't just walk off a ship like this without——"

"So long as they don't think the truth, you haven't anything to bother about."

"But——"

"You're arguing too much. Better start down the ladder."

"Wh—where are we going?"

"Up-river."

"Yes. But how far?"

"I don't know yet. We'll have to discuss that later."

"—— you, Langton——"

"Shut up. And keep your hands in front of you. Shooting me wouldn't do you a bit of good, and the chances are you'd miss. Get down the ladder, you swine, before I kick you down."

Langton did not raise his voice. In fact, he lowered it and stepped swiftly near to Grailie's right hand hip-pocket as he spoke. The major whined incoherently and his hands fumbled in front of him as if he did not know what to do with them. Then, with a furtive glance in the direction of the smoking-room, he began the unwilling descent of the companion ladder.

"I haven't my helmet," he whimpered, half-way down. "The sun'll——"

"Tomorrow morning'll be time enough to think about that," Langton informed him, and kept close watch on the major's right hand.

"But my wife—she'll be worried and——"

"We'll send her a note," Langton interrupted dryly, pausing on the bottom step, with the major on the landing below. "And before we go any farther, I think you'd better let me take that gun."

Grailie did not hear the tail-end of the advice. He felt, with demoralizing suddenness, a lean, steel-wire forearm across his throat, bending him back and shutting off his wind, and he was so intent upon preserving his balance on the none too steady companion-ladder that it is doubtful if he knew just when Langton came into possession of the gun. A light splash heralded the revolver's fate, and then Langton was saying in a low monotone:

"All right. Step aboard."

Grailie looked blankly down into the upturned face of a wide-eyed native in a loin cloth who sat in a canoe alongside. Several shadowy figures inquisitively lined the rail of the *Sapeli's* promenade-deck by this time, and Langton knew that, if the thing were to be done, without arousing too much suspicion, it would have to be done without further delay.

"Move!" sharply. "Want me to chuck you in head first?"

"You'll suffer for——"

"I know that. I'm going to have you for company. Get an edge on. I can't stand here fooling with you all night."

"You can't compel me to go! I'm —— if——"

"All right. Let's go up on deck again. Those fellows up there are itching to know what it's all about."

Grailie glanced fearfully upward, hesitated a second or two, started guiltily when the siren of a launch screeched a warning of its approach out of the darkness up-river, then stepped gingerly into the canoe.

Langton followed before the major had an opportunity to change his mind, mumbled a word of command to Dubla, and in an instant they were gliding off, sheering as far away as possible from the approaching launch.

Two or three minutes later, with the lights of the *Sapeli* drifting astern, while the major cursed and threatened alternately, Langton asked Dubla—

"'Nother paddle live?"

"Yessah," producing another paddle from under his feet.

Langton took the paddle from the wondering boy's hand and held it out to the major.

"Here you are, Grailie. You get nothing for nothing in this world. And the exercise will do you good. Either that or swim. Take your choice."

This time Grailie swore in real earnest. His previous efforts had been as nothing in comparison, and the things he promised would happen to Langton in the near future were not lovely.

Langton shortened his grip on the paddle, and the major's lurid flow of words was stemmed by the flat of the blade hitting him flush across the mouth.

He screamed, and Langton hit him again as calmly as if he were saying, "Good morning."

"Work or swim," he said calmly. "It's all the same to me."

Grailie held his hand over his bleeding mouth and crouched away from Langton, trembling violently with pain and fear and an impotent rage. He was remembering among other things that he had never quite succeeded in swimming a hundred yards, even in still water, and the Forcados River, particularly at night, was equivalent to suicide. This was one of the reasons why he had confined his resistance to Langton to the medium of threats and highly colored language. He was afraid to move about too much in case the canoe might capsize.

Therefore, it was not "all the same" to Grailie whether he worked or swam. So, after a while, wheezing like an asthmatic bull-pup, his arms made some pretense of lifting and falling in unison with Dubla's. It was not a pleasing performance and when Langton had watched it and listened to the major's whining threats and complaints for several minutes, his hand dipped almost absently into the paper bag he held in his lap.

The result was a large red-cheeked apple which he regarded for a moment or two with a look of speculation as if he were wondering whether he should risk another disappointment. Then, gripping the apple in his long, lean right hand, he sank his teeth into it in a manner that had nothing whatever to do with etiquette.

Instantly he *knew*. His eyes leaped and he grinned in a slow, sure way that Grant of Siluko would have thought impossible. The second bite followed and the third, and presently, as he threw the core of the second apple overboard, he sat watching Grailie's arms rise and fall laboriously and laughed out loud in sheer enjoyment of the spectacle.

"Laugh, —— you!" Grailie growled. "Wait till we get ashore!"

Langton did not mind. He did not feel nearly so antagonistic toward the major now. That Grailie was a most unsavory brute and a card-cheat and a wife-beater and various other unpleasant things, suddenly did not seem to matter. At least, Langton did not now feel that the major's methods and morals were any business of his, and if there had been any way in which he could, justifiably, have thrown Grailie into the river and gone off without him, he would have considered the matter agreeably settled all around.

Of course, it was out of the question to go back with him. That would be altogether too much bother, and besides Mrs. Grailie would be horribly disappointed; so there was nothing else to do but to put up with him until he could place him on board a cargo steamer at a convenient distance upriver, a distance that would make it impossible for Grailie to return to Forcados in time to sail on the *Sapeli*.

Grailie, of course, could not be expected to appreciate any of this even if it had been explained to him, but Langton said before he sank his teeth in the third apple:

"You can stop paddling, major. You make a rotten job of it anyway."

Grailie dropped the paddle without any loss of time.

"Where are we going?" he whined, so that he almost wept.

Langton laughed at the tearful note in the other man's voice.

"Don't cry, Grailie. We won't hurt you."

"Where are we going?" the major shrieked. "Where are you taking me to?"

Langton ate the third apple with selfish greed before he spoke again. Finally he said, with an assumption of seriousness that, at first, was convincing even to Grailie.

"Your perspective on this thing is all wrong, Grailie. You're blaming me for this rumpus, whereas civilization is the responsible party. Table manners particularly. If etiquette hadn't insisted upon me eating apples with a knife, I don't think you would be here now."

"Wha's'at!"

The major peered at Langton through the rain of perspiration on his face.

"No," simply. "I don't think you would. The only way to eat an apple, major, is with your hands and teeth. I traveled three days in this thing to get one, and etiquette insisted upon my eating it with a knife. Of course, that made me furious, and I took it out on you. Consequently, you're here. Isn't that ——?"

Grailie did not say what it was. Neither did he see any humor in it. In fact, for the remainder of the night he was extraordinarily quiet, crouching in his seat and moving only when the mosquitoes bothered him.

And when, in the morning, Langton allowed him to board a gin-tank that was bound for Warri, and would probably reach Forcados two days later, Grailie puffed his way up the gin-tank's rope ladder without even a whisper of profanity. There was no color in his face. He looked like a man who had been very close to his Maker.

The skipper of the gin-tank offered him a drink and when he gulped it down, the skipper asked—

"What's the idea of wanderin' around the rivers like this?"

Grailie's smile was sickly, but there was truth in it. From Grailie's standpoint he had never been more truthful.

"He's mad. That fellow Langton. If he has to eat apples with a knife, he goes crazy. Wh-wh-what the —— do you think of that? And I've been in that canoe with him all night!"

WHATEVER the *Sapeli's* passengers may have thought of Major Grailie's unorthodox disappearance, they were careful not to sympathize with the major's wife when the major failed to put in an appearance at sailing-time.

Most of them felt that the occasion was one for congratulation, and though the affair was puzzling enough to create much whispering comment, no one was surprized when Mrs. Grailie's worried look vanished as soon as the *Sapeli* was safely across the Forcados bar and beyond all hope of being overtaken by Grailie.

And after that there was at least one woman who mentioned Langton's name in her prayers.

This could not be said of Grant of Siluko. When Langton, once more clothed in the habiliments of labor, stepped stiffly from his canoe at the Coribi mangrove-stick breakwater, he found Grant waiting for him.

"Where in —— have you been?" Grant asked impolitely with the czar-like privilege which trading agents enjoyed.

Langton grinned a tired but happy grin and drew from a crumpled paper bag a solitary apple. He held it out to Grant.

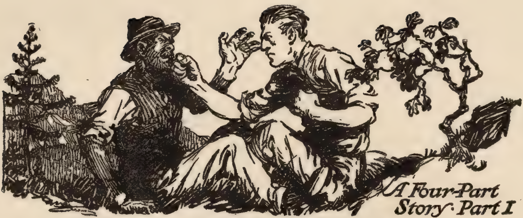
"Ever since Eve handed one to Adam the apple has been regarded as the symbol of hard labor—the fruit of salt sweat and tears," he said, as if he expected to be taken seriously. "But this one's different. It is the fruit of mirth and freedom. Eat it and laugh."

Grant took the apple mechanically. Like Langton he had not seen one in months, and he knew how far he had had to go to get it. Therefore, since Langton was not drunk, he regarded him with natural suspicion, remembering at the same time that concession men as good as he was were hard to find.

"Hunh! You look sane enough." A pause. "Going to stick on the job this time?"

Langton nodded. He was more intent on the movements of Grant's hands than on his face. Then, staring a little, he muttered something about breakfast and walked abruptly away.

Grant was cutting slices off the apple with a jack-knife.



A Four-Part Story · Part I

CAT-O'-MOUNTAIN

by ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Author of "Tuphan—the Thunderstorm," "Tiger River," etc.

FOREWORD

AT THE northern end of the Shawangunk Range lies a region where the Maker of Mountains went mad.

Into his new-laid rock the giant crashed his huge hammer, smashing asunder his handiwork, gouging out chasms, splitting it into fissure and cavern and abyss, slashing its eastern edge into a frowning precipice. When he had gone, up into some of his hammer-scars welled subterranean waters, forming crag-bound lakes hundreds of feet higher than the rugged valley floor. Other chasms became gulfs of verdure, crammed with a veritable jungle of hardwoods and evergreens. And there, in the labyrinth of tree and boulder, fierce brutes and venomous snakes bred and fought and slew. It was the home of the wolf, the panther, and the bear; of the rattlesnake and the copperhead.

Then came men—tawny savages who killed and ate the wild beasts and clothed themselves in their furry hides. Through the gorges and down the slopes they laid their trails, along which they roved for centuries in hunt and tribal war. At length they paused, staring eastward at new fires burning below them—the fires of white men.

The inevitable followed. First by firewater, then by firearms, the Dutch settlers crowded the tawny "duyvils" out of the forested lowlands between the river of Hendrick Hudson and the mountain wall. But behind that wall, in the natural stronghold created by the mad Mountain Maker, the red men long held their own. More, at times they swooped out from the one small gap in the cliffs on bloody raids. And when the vengeful whites retaliated with invasions of their fastness, they ambushed those palefaces along their trails.

Then the settlers ended it. Trapped again and again within that gulf, they in turn became the trappers. Stealthily moving in force, they garrisoned the heights of Mohonk and Minnewaska; they outwitted, out-maneuvered, out-ambushed the Indians; they herded them back against their own precipices, cornered them among their own boulders, slew them without mercy. Returning to their lowland farms, they left behind them a silent, blood-spattered, death-strewn hole in the hills which henceforth—because of its traps and countertraps—was to be known as The Traps.

Long afterward, men came in again; white men, and red men too, no longer foes. They cleared little farms, brought in their women, intermarried and interbred, led such primitive existences as might have been expected. Dwelling in their own little world, they followed their own inclinations in such matters as mating and hunting and drinking—and thereby achieved a reputation somewhat dubious. The tongue-wagging folk outside declared the Trapsmen were "wife swappers" and "moonshiners" and other things. And perhaps they were.

Rumor has asserted, too, that these men first settled that craggy hole not because

"Cat-o'-Mountain," copyright, 1922, by Arthur O. Friel.

they would but because they must; that the country outside was too hot for them; that they even had to obtain their wives by becoming squaw men or by the primeval custom of capture; and that for many years their land was distinctly unsafe for any man not of their clan. This also may be true. Be that as it may, they lived hard lives, and many of them died hard deaths. Yet they lived as free men, untrammeled by slavish subservience to the myriad laws manufactured in the cities beyond them.

But they, too, passed. As the bear and the wolf and the Indian faded out of that country after the coming of the white man, so the Trapsmen have almost vanished before the encroachments of commercialism. Beside the upland lakes now rise those structures from which the pioneer turns with loathing—summer hotels. Moreover, virtually all of the intervening Traps has been bought in by the hotel barons. The little homes of the vanished men are slowly rotting apart; their tiny fields and their hard-grown orchards are going the way of the ancient Indian trails—disappearing into wilderness where snakes thrive unmolested. Few indeed are the people who now live in the mountain bowl; fewer still those who are native-born. The others are from outside.

Yet there are, in the region round about, two or three old men—taciturn, abrupt, whole-souled old fellows—who were born in the Traps and who will die not far from the Traps. From them, and from the whispering ghosts which, by day and by dark, have drifted along beside me on the silent trails and talked to me in weird crevasse and uncanny old house, I have learned the tale which is here set down. It is a tale of Yesterday, in a land of Yesterday, chronicled by one who was there—yesterday.—
A. O. F. New York, 1922.

CHAPTER I

THE PANTHER

HIGH on the crags a panther screamed. Savage, sinister, yet appallingly human—like the malevolent squall of an infuriated hag—the cry tore through the night shadows whelming the mountain-girt gulf of the Traps. Among the gigantic boulders and the uncanny crevasses of Dickie Barre it hurtled in a shattered wave of sound. Out across the dense tangle of underbrush and the lazy-creeping water of Coxing Kill it fled, freezing in their tracks the smaller brethren of the wild—fox and raccoon and rabbit and mink—which moved there in their furtive foraging. From the forested steeps of Mohonk and Millbrook it reverberated, and among those trees it was swallowed up.

Again the malignant wail broke out; and now the beast which voiced it was not in the same spot as before. Somewhere on the very brink of the precipice of Dickie Barre the huge cat had been, and somewhere on that edge he still was. But he was moving, seeking a crack or crevice through which he might steal swiftly downward without hurling himself to death on the rubble of cliff-fragments below; and his failure to find it at once exasperated his ugly nature to its ugliest. His eyes told him something down there was moving. His nose said the thing was human, was hurt, was harmless. His fierce brain knew it would be an easy kill, and his ravening jaws slavered at the realization that after one rending attack he could gorge himself—on the tender flesh of a woman.

Baffled, maddened, he screeched once more. Then he became silent. He had found something promising; not a direct line of descent, but a narrow shelf dipping diagonally down the face of the cliff. Along this he proceeded with swift, sure stealth.

Then, down in the density behind him, a light shot out from between two towering boulders. A clean, brilliant beam it was—the ray of a carbide camp-lamp. Its white sheen played up, down, right, left; and as it moved, the rock-masses and the trees and brush round about stood forth, then vanished again into the gloom. But it did not advance. Between those two colossal blocks it stayed, peering like a dazzling eye.

All at once it jumped. From the chaos of chunks between silent cat and silent light, a voice had cried out.

"Help! Oh—help!"

It was a high, clear, penetrating call, with an undernote of terror and pain.

Two voices answered—one a ferine snarl from the merciless cat-creature beyond; the other, a quick response in the tones of a man.

"Right here! Where are you?"

"Here into the—the rocks! Oh hurry up, before that critter gits to me!"

"Coming!"

The glaring white eye moved forward in

haste. Behind it, boots scraped and bumped on rock. It rose in a steep slant, slid suddenly down, accompanied by more scraping of boot-heels; disappeared between two blocks leaning together; emerged beyond, ascended again, wavering erratically with the strain of climbing a treacherous slope; halted at the peak of another boulder and rapidly searched the surroundings.

"Can't see you!" the man panted. "Speak up!"

"Hold stiddy a minute!" implored the other voice. "I'm a-comin'—up this rock—if I don't slip. Oh!"

The last was a choked moan.

"What's the matter? Hurt?"

"Ye-yes. But wait—I'm a-comin'——"

The light quivered, as if the man behind it were impatient to leap forward. But it remained poised on its own boulder, shooting at the upper edge of another mass of conglomerate beyond which the girlish voice had spoken. A few seconds later, atop that rough stone, something glinted red-gold in the white glare. Under it rose wide gray eyes, a pale face—the eyes suddenly shut and the face shrank from the blinding beam. Again the gas ray lighted up the glowing glory of the red hair.

"All right. Stick there," commanded the man.

A quick twist of the light—then another grind of sliding heels, terminating in a solid bump like the impact of a gun-butt against stone. The white eye now was swinging about at the base of the boulder, hunting a way around the almost vertical block. A few seconds, and it began staggering over the smaller débris toward one corner.

"Oh—look out—here's the critter now!"

With the warning came a swift scramble overhead. The light wheeled and revealed a girlish figure in a torn drab dress swinging itself out—slipping rapidly down—hanging by its hands from the upper edge.

"Hold hard!" snapped the man. "Don't be silly—he's a coward, like all cats. He'll run if you say 'boo.' Hang tight a minute. Don't drop."

But the girl, dangling with face turned upward and heels a yard or more above the jagged jumble below, sniffed scornfully at his assertion of knowledge. Before he could make two steps toward her she let go. Down she darted in a grayish streak, and on the stones beneath she crumpled.

One sharp moan of pain broke from her. Then, looking upward, she breathed—

"Look!"

THE light switched up. From the edge above now protruded another head; a flat-nosed, fang-toothed, tawny visage whose eyes flamed green with ferocity and whose snarling jaws writhed in malignant menace.

A startled grunt sounded behind the light. The white eye lifted, hung poised as if held by a hand grown rigid. Beside it, twin tubes of steel centered on that horrid head.

Boom! Boom! A double flash leaped thundering from the tubes. In a swirl of blue smoke the face of the great cat vanished.

The light pitched backward, fell clattering on the rocks. A muffled impact and a sullen thwack of metal told that the man, and his gun too, had been knocked down by the recoil. Over behind the boulder something else thudded softly and was still.

But, though dropped, the lantern burned faithfully on. Its ray lighted up a pair of high laced boots, tan corduroys, and a hammerless shotgun sprawling on a slanting boulder. A second later a broad hand swooped at it and righted it. The gun was lifted, broken at the breech, swiftly reloaded and snapped shut. Then the legs drew up and the light rose, darting at the girl.

She was huddled where she had dropped, but her pale face was alive and her gray eyes wide open. As the glare fell on her she threw up an arm to shield her dark-dilated pupils. Upon the tanned skin of that firm young forearm showed a long red gash.

"Good Lord! You're badly hurt!" exclaimed the man.

The lips under the shadowing arm curved in a strained smile.

"'Taint much," she deprecated. "I got a gouge when I tumbled. Guess you kilt Mister Catamount, or scairt him off anyway. They take a mighty lot of killin' sometimes. Now can you git me down to where I can walk? My ankle's hurt."

A quiet laugh of admiration came from the invisible man.

"You're a plucky little lady," he informed her. "Most girls in your place would be fainting or going all to pieces. As for walking, I don't know. This is a tough hole to navigate in after dark. But we'll see."

The light moved toward her. As it davanced the man added in a chiding tone:

"You shouldn't have dropped like that. No wonder your ankle's hurt."

"Is that so! What was I goin' to do, Mister Smarty—let that critter claw me? And I hurt my leg an hour ago, not jest now. And I wish you'd look and see if the catamount's alive yet. He's been pesterin' round here 'most a month, and you better kill him good and dead."

"Oh, he's dead enough——"

"You go and look!"

Again the quiet laugh sounded.

"Just as you say, my lady. I think I heard him fall over back there."

Once more the light turned. It wavered around the base of the boulder, bobbed up and down among the jags and juts of the rock-heap, paused, swung slowly, came to rest on a furry huddle hanging limp over a misshapen stone. There dangled two powerful fore-legs, topped by massive shoulders, terminated by big paws. Between them hung a red ruin which had been a head.

"Whew!" whistled the man, studying the size of the legs and the breadth of the back. "What a brute! Never knew they grew so big. Lucky he was close enough to take those charges before they could spread. Otherwise that bird-shot would only have maddened him."

Turning, he picked his way back to the spot where the girl waited. He found her sitting up on a stone and frowning down at her left foot. For the first time he observed that her feet and the shapely ankles above them were bare. The left one was much swollen.

"He's as dead as they make 'em," he sang out cheerily. "We're a bunged-up lot, aren't we? Cat lost his head, your arm and foot are hurt, and my right shoulder's kicked into the middle of my back from letting both barrels go at once. And even my gun is all mauled from falling on the rocks."

"Ain't that too bad?" The tone was amusedly sarcastic. "But I guess I'm the wust off—I've got more bad luck comin'."

"How so?"

"I'll catch —— when I git home," was the naive explanation.

For a minute the man was speechless. Then he chuckled.

"So? Then why go home?"

The mountain girl's answer was as straightforward as before.

"I don't know any other place to go."

Her sober face told that she spoke the gaunt truth, and that she dreaded the thought of returning to the house whence she had come. An awkward pause followed.

"Well, you may not get there tonight," the man declared. "I doubt if I can find my way out of this mess of rocks before daylight, and you certainly can't go scrambling around on that bad foot. You'll have to come to my camp now and get bandaged up."

The auburn brows drew together in another frown, and the eyes under them peered toward him in open suspicion.

"I ain't so sure about that," she asserted. "I can git home some way alone, if I have to, and I don't figger to stay up here all night. Who are you?"

"Oh, just a rambling camper. But don't be silly. I'm not a skunk. I'll gladly take you home if it's possible and sensible, but until you're in condition to travel it's neither. Now you need a bandage on that arm, some hot water on the ankle, and—are you hungry?"

"I'm 'most starved," she admitted. "I got mad and run away this mornin', and I ain't et since breakfast."

"Oho! I'm afraid you're a temperamental little red-bird. Well, come on down to camp and I'll feed you bacon and beans—and hot coffee, lots of it. How's that?"

"Sounds awful good. I guess you're all right. You go 'long and show the way."

She turned about on her stone. The movement disclosed a long rent in the faded dress, running from arm to waist, through which glowed pink flesh. Her skirt, too, was badly ripped. The man behind the light switched it from her to the formidable mass of stones ahead.

"If you can stub along on one foot," he suggested, "we can make better progress by hugging each other. I can stand it if you can."

A quick laugh answered him. The light veered back, revealing dancing eyes, perfect teeth, and flushed cheeks under the glowing hair.

"I can stand 'most anything—if I have to," she flashed. "And it looks like I'd have to."

"By George! Young lady, you're a little beauty when you laugh! I think I'm going to enjoy this trip. Wait a minute and I'll let you put your arm around my neck."

Followed the grind of boot-soles and the approach of the lamp.

"You're awful good." She laughed again. "You'd ought to sell soft soap for a livin', you've got so much of it."

"Humph! That'll do. Now let's walk."

Slowly the white eye wabbled along among the tumbled blocks. The only sounds behind it were those of labored breathing and curt directions regarding the placing of feet. Not once did the girl whimper from the pain of the injured ankle.

Presently the pair of tall cliff-chunks took shape ahead, their bases lost among smaller stones, their crests invisible in the upper gloom, their irregular sides framing a narrow black cañon which seemed to end in emptiness. But out from that gloomy slit drifted a tang of smoldering wood-smoke; and beyond it, the girl knew, the hidden camp of her unknown rescuer waited.

At the entrance to the covert they paused. So narrow was the passage that they could no longer advance side by side. But the carbide flame showed that the footing ahead was smooth and almost level, offering no obstacle to her progress alone; also, that the distance to the cavern beyond was hardly more than a couple of rods.

"Now if you'll hop along by yourself for a few yards you'll be there," spoke the tall, vague form behind the metal lamp. "Sorry my doorway's so tight, but it was made before I came here."

The injured girl, drooping against a stone beside her, let the jest pass without a smile.

"You go ahead," she prompted wearily. "You've got boots."

"What of it?" he puzzled.

"Snakes."

"Ouch! Snakes around here?"

"Why, sure. This country's full of 'em—rattlers and copperheads. Guess you ain't been into here long, mister."

"Right. I haven't. But— Lordy! You shouldn't go around barefoot in snake country."

"Mebbe. But folks can't wear out their shoes into Summer if they're goin' to have 'em for Winter, can they?"

He made no reply. Into the gap he turned, and through it he passed to the larger space beyond, his wide shoulders rubbing the rock as he passed. Behind him she limped along, leaning against one wall.

At the end of the little cañon he stepped downward, halted, and set gun and lamp on a rock shelf. Some twenty feet away, under an overhang of the cliff, an open blanket-roll and various small camp-tools showed beside an Indian fire—short sticks laid like wagon-wheel spokes, with the flame at the hub.

"Now you can hug me for the last time—maybe," he solemnly stated. "I'm going to tote you over there. It's rough going."

With which she was lifted and carried across a rubble of fragments to the blankets.

As he straightened up in the brilliant light thrown across by the lamp, she saw him plainly for the first time—a lithe, firm-jawed man whose face glowed red with new sunburn between a gray flannel shirt and a head of silky blond hair; a clean-mouthed, clean-limbed chap whose twinkling blue eyes might have brought an approving smile to the lips of many a girl far more critical of men than this maiden of the mountains. But no hint of liking for her new-found friend dawned in her face.

Into her eyes darted a light of mingled recognition, suspicion, repulsion. She shrank from him as if he had suddenly become one of those snakes against which she had just warned him.

"Oh Lord!" she breathed. "It's you! The detective!"

CHAPTER II

NIGGER NAT'S GIRL

BLANK astonishment crept across the countenance of the blond man. Motionless as the rocks around him he stood, staring down at the hostile face upturned to his.

"Detective? Me?" he muttered.

"Yes, you!" she flared. "Think you're smart, don't you? Mebbe you think us folks are a lot of numbskulls, but we ain't. And seein' you jest helped me out of a fix, I'll tell you somethin', Mister Spy—you better git outen the Traps right quick, while you're able to travel!"

The man threw back his head and laughed—a gurgling laugh of pure enjoyment.

"Well, if this isn't rich!" he chuckled. "Old Cap Hampton, the famous dee-teck-tiff! Say, little red-bird, I'm glad you dropped in this evening. I was thinking I'd go tomorrow, but now I reckon I'll stay awhile. Looks as if this place might prove interesting."

The gray eyes snapped.

"Oh, it'll be interestin'!" was the ominous prediction. "If you don't git right outside the Big Wall and stay out—some of the boys will be sleepin' into new blankets and totin' a new-fangled shotgun, I shouldn't wonder."

His gaze dropped to the blankets under her, which were obviously new; then darted to his hammerless gun across the way. When his eyes returned to hers the merriment was gone from them. They glinted like cold, blue steel.

"So that's the game, eh?" His voice was hard-edged. "To kill a stranger for his gun and money. Well, your 'boys' are slow. They were snooping around my camp down by the creek last night, but they didn't have the nerve to do anything but watch. Thanks for your tip. Hereafter I'll load my gun with buckshot. You can tell your friends that."

A flush of anger dyed the girl's cheeks.

"Oh, that ain't it!" she denied. "Strangers are safe enough, long's they mind their own business. But we've got no use for sneakin' spies that den up into the rocks like copperheads. And if you think anybody's scairt of your buckshot, Mister Spy, jest remember this is old Injun country, and folks was gittin' kilt into the Traps before your grandpop was borned. If all the dead men that's been shot and tommyhawked round here should git up all together they'd—they'd shake the hills with their trompin'! You and your buckshot— Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Her scornful laugh stung like a whiplash. Yet, though his sunburned face grew still redder under its sting, he thought:

"Lordy, what a stunning little beauty she is with that color! There's more than one kind of wildcat in these hills, too. I like this place better every minute."

Aloud he said:

"All right, fair damosel. I don't know——"

Abruptly she started up—winced and paled as her sprained ankle stabbed with pain—but caught the wall and faced him in righteous wrath.

"Don't you cuss me!" she blazed.

"Huh? I didn't!"

"You did! You called me a dam-somethin'——"

"Oho! Fair damosel? Why, that's an old-fashioned compliment—means 'beautiful girl,' or something like that. Would you rather be called a cross-eyed old maid?"

"No!"

The word snapped. But she smiled in spite of herself.

"You must be a furriner to talk like that," she added. "Why don't you say what you mean? Dam-o-sel—that ain't a name to call folks by. It's 'most the same as what mom calls me."

"What's that?"

"—— brat."

He regarded her a moment in silence.

"Your mother calls you a brat?" he slowly asked then.

"Brat—and lots of other things," she nodded. "And now I've got to git home. I'll git a good hidin', I shouldn't wonder, but I won't stay here——"

"You will!" came his incisive contradiction. "You'll stay here until that foot is doctored and you've had some food. Sit down!"

At the crisp crackle of his command she eyed him in surprized defiance. Her chin lifted, and she took a combative step on the hurt foot. Pallor and pain swept again across her face, and she staggered. He promptly picked her up, squirming and resisting; set her down on the blankets, and inexorably held her there. Then, his eyes boring into hers, he spoke in cool determination:

"Behave yourself. Listen to me.

"You're not going away until I say so. I'll not say so until you're better able to travel. You won't be able to travel until that ankle is reduced. It won't be reduced until I've worked on it. That's all there is to that.

"Now about me. I'm no detective. I am Douglas Hampton, a rover, a drifter, with no home and no folks. I've been in quite a few places, done quite a few things; but I've never been a detective and I don't intend to be one. My last job was as reporter on a New York newspaper, and I lasted almost a year. Got fired last week because the city editor rode me too hard and I sat him down in his own waste-basket. Now I'm in here because I feel like roughing it awhile and somebody told me it was rough up here in the Shawangunks.

"I intended to stay here only a day or two and then ramble along, stopping again wherever I found something that hit my fancy. But now that people around here think they're going to kick me out—I'll stay longer. I'm one of those cantankerous chaps who can be coaxed a mile but can't be kicked an inch. I always kick back.

"As I started to say awhile ago, I don't know the history of this hole in the hills, but I'm right willing to learn all about it—past and present. And if people around here want to consider me a detective, let 'em. I don't care what they think. The only reason why I'm telling *you* who I am is—well, because I feel like it."

With that he took his hands from her shoulders and straightened up. She made no move to rise again. Steadily she probed his face, and slowly she nodded.

"You talk straight," she admitted. "But if you ain't here to spy, what are you doin' up here, hid into the ledge? Folks said you went out through the Gap this mornin' with your pack and all. So tonight I thought you must be some new feller."

"I did go. I moved because I want to sleep at night instead of watching men sneak around in the bushes. Then I decided to come back, and I came. Didn't try to hide myself, either—tramped right along the road. You people ought to keep sharper watch on desperate dee-teck-tiffs who wander in and out of here; you never know when they'll come back."

His cheerful grin brought an answering smile this time. But it did not last long. At his next question it vanished.

"By the way, what am I supposed to detect in here? Detectives have to detect something, you know."

"You be careful, mister, or you'll detect a rock fallin' off onto your head from up top, or a load of buckshot scatterin' out of the brush. Some of the boys are awful careless. If you figger to stay round here you better stay away from these ledges—and keep out of caves—and don't ask too many questions."

"M-hm! I take it that this is a good place to keep *still*."

Her tongue made no answer; but her eyes narrowed at the emphasis on the word "still." He laughed again and bent to freshen the fire.

WHEN he had moved the sticks inward upon their common focus and the flame was growing brighter and hotter, he frowned at a canvas water-bag pendent from a splinter of rock; thoughtfully eyed the girl's inflamed ankle and gashed arm; glanced at a small coffee-pot at the edge of the blaze, and ran a hand through his light hair. Then his face brightened. Rising, he rummaged in a small bag of waterproof fabric, from which he produced two flat tins of tobacco.

"Have to economize on water," he said. "All I own is in that cloth bucket, and the spring's a deuce of a distance down. Between bathing your arm and making coffee and fixing your ankle—well, I just can't cook that ankle as it should be done. But I can draw out most of the soreness with a tobacco poultice. That's what we'll have to do."

She eyed the two tins in his hand.

"Is that all the tobacco you've got?"

"Why, yes. But it's enough to do the trick."

"Then what'll you smoke? There ain't any stores here."

"Then I don't smoke for awhile," was the matter-of-fact reply.

Dropping the cans beside her, he strode over to the lantern and brought it and the gun to the overhanging wall. Swiftly then he put coffee to boil, dipped a cupful of water from the canvas bag, flipped a clean white handkerchief from the ditty-bag, and returned to her. Without a word she let him inspect the lacerated arm.

"You got a nasty rip," he stated, scowling. "Right along the bone. How did you do it? Fall?"

"Yes." Her tone was more gentle now than it had yet been, and her eyes dwelt on the sober face bending over the injury. "I've—I've got a little secret up here—a hole into the rocks that's been my playhouse since I was little, and when mom's awful mean or pop's ugly drunk or—or I can't stand it down there, I come up here and stay all by my own self. This time I got to dreamin', I guess, and I went to sleep there. And when I woke up it was night. Mebbe I'd ought to have stayed there till mornin', but I was awful hungry, and I tried to git down the rocks and took a fall."

He nodded sympathetically, bathing the wound with gentle touch.

"And then that mis'rable catamount had to smell me. They're awful bad when they're hungry and smell blood. I thought I was a goner till your light showed. Who ever told you a catamount would run if you said 'Boo?'"

"Somebody who didn't know as much as he thought he did, I guess."

"I guess so too. They'll run from a dog 'most every time—even a little yippin' yappin' tarrier—and mostly they'll run from a man, but not always. If they've kilt somethin' or are jest goin' to kill somethin', look out. And they're ready to tear up a young 'un, or a hurt woman, any time. If you shoot 'em you've got to kill 'em stone dead or they'll rip you. Jonah Hay, he kilt one last Winter—shot it four times and blew its jaw off and everything—and it lived long enough to git to him and claw his legs terrible. Its hide was longer than Jonah is himself, and Jonah stands six foot."

He nodded again, absorbed in his work but marveling at her new friendliness. Now that she was talking, she chattered as easily as if to an old friend.

"And there was Sam Codd—he went to chop wood and run onto a little bobcat, nowheres near as big's a catamount. The critter had kilt a rabbit, and it come at Sam, ready to jump right onto him. Sam, he backed more'n a quarter of a mile through the snow, holdin' his ax ready to bust the critter, till he got to his cabin. Then he jumped in and got his gun. But by the time he come out the cat was gone back to the rabbit, and when he got there the rabbit was et and nothin' left but blood and tracks."

He desisted from his cleaning of the arm, which had remained as stoically steady as if it were not in the least tender. Tearing the edges of the big handkerchief, he bound it around the injury and carefully knotted the edge-strips. Then he turned to the coffee, which now was steaming. In a moment he put a cupful of the hot liquid in her hands and dumped the grounds from the pot.

"Only one good cupful to a pot, but it's strong enough to knock you over," he explained. "And I need the pot now for your ankle. After the tobacco gets to drawing I'll cook some grub and make more coffee——"

He paused suddenly, staring at one of the tobacco-tins he had picked up. Its blue revenue-paper seal was broken.

"Now when did I open that can?" he puzzled, turning up the lid. "I was sure these were fresh. Confound it, it's only half full!"

She made no answer. She blew on the coffee and took a tentative sip.

"Ooh! It's scaldin' hot!"

"Uh-huh. Well, this other can's full, anyhow. Guess I can make out."

While the fresh water came to a boil he squinted repeatedly at the opened can, half-rifled of its fragrant brown slices. He did not see the impish glances she threw at him. Nor, when he brought the hot water, the tobacco, and more handkerchiefs, did he spy the laughing light in the demurely downcast eyes.

With utmost care, though with necessary firmness, he bound the hot-water-soaked slices around the swollen ankle. Then he poured more hot water on the bandages until, despite herself, she flinched and drew up the foot.

"That'll do, I reckon," he said. "Lucky I have plenty of handkerchiefs. That's one thing I'm a crank about—plenty of clean handkerchiefs and socks. Now I'll warm up some beans *à la* can."

"Don't you want a smoke?" she teased.

"Well, since the tobacco's all gone, I do," he frankly admitted. "However——"

"Then fill your pipe!"

From under the blanket-edge she produced the missing slices.

"Well, you—you——" he stuttered.

"Now don't you call me a dam-sel again, mister! You stuff your pipe and have a good smoke."

He scowled, grinned, laughed, produced a stubby brier, and obeyed orders.

"I've a large mind to spank you," he threatened, between puffs. "But I never like to pick on a cripple. So instead I'll condemn you to stay here all night."

"That's all right," she countered serenely. "I've made up my mind to stay anyway."

He missed two puffs while he stared at her.

"Glad to see you're showing sense," he blurted. "But what's the reason for the sudden change of heart?"

"You're smokin' the reason. 'Most any man round here would have kilt that catamount. That'd be fun. But none of 'em would use up his last smokin' on a woman—not if both her legs were busted. A feller that would do that is worth trustin'."

He threw up his hands.

"Talk about feminine logic! That beats 'em all," he laughed. "Well, fair dam—I beg pardon—young woman, just who are you, if I may ask?"

The answer staggered him.

"Me? Oh, I'm only Nigger Nat's girl."

Over his pipe he blinked at her.

"My name's Marry," she went on. "Marry Oaks. My whole name is Marryin', but it's Marry for short."

"Marion," he repeated absently. "But who's Nigger Nat? Not a colored man!"

The frank eyes looked steadily back at him.

"Why, yes he is. He's yeller—half-nigger. He's my pop. And mom's part Injun."

CHAPTER III

PIPE-SMOKE—AND POWDER-SMOKE

DAWN swept across the Shawangunks. From the far-off crests of the Berkshires light leaped athwart the silvery Hudson and smote the frowning cliffs of the Great Wall of the Wallkill Valley—a grim gray precipice stretching mile after mile to the northeast, towering eight hundred feet upward from the lower lands; unscalable, impenetrable save at one small high gap—the Jaws of the Traps, whence in other days the redskin had slipped forth in bloody foray on the settlers below, and where in turn the white man had lurked in retaliatory ambush. Through that gap now wormed the sandy road of the descendants of those pioneers, and along that road at this early hour passed nothing more sinister than dawn-sheen and morning breeze.

At the top of the crag-wall the light sped across the forested gulf of the Traps itself, with its tiny scattered farm-houses and its rocky clearings and mysterious by-paths, to strike against more cliffs—the glacier-gouged wall of Minnewaska, holding in its stony setting a tiny jewel of an upland lake; and the fissured butte of Dickie Barre, father of gigantic boulders and guardian of unknown caverns. And as the day-shine flung itself against those forbidding ledges and then fled on westward, the following breeze also threw against them a wave of sound—the dry, quacking chorus of myriads of katydids.

All through the moonless September night those queer insects had ground out their tuneless song, so monotonous and so steady that the ears of other living things had long since become dulled to it. But now, swept by the dawn-wind in among the echoing crevices and cañons, it seemed suddenly redoubled in volume. Upon the senses of native bird and beast it made slight impact, for they were well used to it; but on the nerves of a long, blanketed figure lying in a narrow passage between towering stone walls it struck like the clatter of an alarm-clock. His tousled blond head moved, his long-lashed lids lifted, and his blue eyes darted about in inspection of his surroundings.

Beside his head lay a shotgun, its muzzle pointing outward, its safety-catch off, ready for instant use. Beyond the slit of an entrance showed nothing but more rocks and a labyrinthine tangle of trees and brush. Behind, the sheer wall of Dickie Barre alone was visible across a roomy space open to the sky. The only sounds were the everlasting quack of the insects and the subdued *yarrup* of some invisible yellowhammer flitting about in search for a breakfast.

He yawned, stretched, and sat up. The blanket dropped from his chest, and he stared blankly at it. Then his gaze shot toward the cliff beyond.

"Well, you ought to be spanked hard, you little bunch of wilfulness!" he muttered. "Sneaked in here after I was asleep and spread this blanket over me, didn't you? And you needed both of 'em yourself—it's clammy up here at night. And walking on that bad foot, too!"

But his eyes belied his growling tone as he arose and tiptoed to the end of the passage. As they swept the farther wall and dwelt on the little huddle of gray blanket beside the charred embers of the fire they softened still more. Obviously the girl, muffled under that stout sheet of wool, was sleeping as peacefully on her mattress of fragrant hemlock tips as if at home in her own bed.

"These mountain girls are as tough as rawhide," he thought. "Imagine a city girl going through what she did last night without a whine! And sleeping like that under a rock. And——"

His hand strayed to a shirt pocket and fingered some crumbled shreds of tobacco, then continued:

"And saving some smokes for me and stubbing over here on a sprained ankle to give me half the bedding. Would any of those flossy dolls in New York—or Chi' or San Fran' or N'Orleans—do that? Humph!"

Softly he stepped along the little shelf where last night he had set lamp and gun; sank to a comfortable squat, his back against the wall; filled and lighted his pipe.

Thereafter he squatted a few minutes smoking and musing.

"'Nigger Nat's girl,'" he thought. "Daddy a drunken yellow mongrel, mother a hard-tongued half-breed. How in thunder can a pair like that produce such a witching wildcat as Marion Oaks? Her skin's brown, but the brown is only sun-tan, or my eyes are liars. And that hair and those eyes! How come?"

A flirt of active wings drew his gaze away for a moment. On a limb of a plucky young pine growing from the face of the cliff above, a pair of inquisitive yellowhammers had paused to spy and gossip. Their bright eyes peered knowingly downward, and as they bobbed and bowed their restless heads the black crescents under their creamy throats vied for notice with the brilliant red splashes behind their crowns. Up and down the branch they hopped, murmuring fussily over this most scandalous event—a man and a girl shamelessly occupying an outdoor boudoir, just as if they were as free of convention as the birds themselves. The man smiled up at them and waved a hand in acknowledgment of their sharp scrutiny. Instantly they winnowed away on whispering wings, to perch again farther on and renew their eager watch. Douglas resumed his puffing and puzzling.

"Must be a throwback of heredity," he decided. "There are such things as red-headed niggers. Saw one in Detroit once. The white strain in her folks cropped out strong when she was born. Must be tough for a girl to be white and yet have the tainted blood in her veins. No self-respecting white man could marry her, of course. But it's a dirty shame that you have to be cursed by your ancestors, little Miss Marion. You haven't a chance. You'll become the 'woman' of some ignorant brute down below, and before you're thirty you'll be old and gaunt and broken-spirited."

He flipped the ash from the top of his pipe-bowl and puffed on.

"And yet your mind is that of a white girl—and a thoroughbred, too," he silently asserted. "The tobacco and the blanket prove that. And you despise your mongrel people. You run away up here to your little secret 'play-house,' and there you dream yourself to sleep, as you did yesterday. And there's poetry in you, too. Let's see, what was that you said—

"If all the dead men here should rise
they'd shake the hills with their tramping!'"

THIS gaze grew absent, as through the smoke he visioned an army of musket-bearing pioneers, shaggy-haired and deerskin-clad, and of fierce-faced Indians carrying bow and tomahawk, marching along the ancient trails. They passed, those long-dead fighting men, and in their wake strode whiskered mountaineers of a later day, gripping shotgun and rifle, watching one another in distrust—the victims of bullet and buckshot hurled from the masking thickets of rhododendron, the men who had died at the hands of their neighbors. Crag and crevasse echoed to the tread of their ghostly feet, and the cliffs quivered in unison. Out through the Jaws of the Traps they swung into the eye of the rising sun. The caverns ceased to echo. The man found himself staring at a gray blanket and listening to the rasping clack of the katydids.

With a long sigh he arose and knocked out his pipe against his thigh.

"Oh well," he muttered. "The past is past, the present is here, and the future is rolling closer every minute. Poor little kid, with your dreams and your picture-words! I'm sorry for you. But all I can do is to cook some more grub for you and take you home. Then we'll each have to gang our ain gait."

He moved toward the dead fire, still stepping softly. But half-way across the rocky rubble he halted short, struck by a sudden memory.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if——"

Back into his mind had come a fragment of a tale told months ago in New York by a chance acquaintance—a man from up-State.

"Yessir," he heard the voice saying, "there's queer things back in the hills—stories that's never been told much. These fellers I'm thinkin' about, now: They were the hardest crowd you'd ever want to meet. They were bad whites and bad Indians and bad niggers, all in this one gang and livin' in back of a long mountain wall with only one way into it. Outlaws? Yessir, and worse'n that. Land pirates, I'd call 'em. Cut your throat and never even wipe off the knife afterwards.

"Well, sir, they'd come out of this here hole-in-the-wall I'm tellin' about, and they'd waylay folks drivin' along the roads, the rich folks in coaches and so on. And they'd kill the men travelers and strip 'em clean. And they'd carry off the women and hold 'em for ransom. And if the ransom wasn't paid the women never got out. They had to stay there and be the women of that gang. If they were extry good-lookin' maybe they never got a chance to be ransomed. More'n one fine lady went into that hole in the hills and never was heard of again. Yessir. That's right.

"Oh yes, it was a long while ago. Good many years before our time. After the Revolution, maybe—it was pretty rough in lots of places round here then, and these fellers could fight off a whole army by guardin' that gap of theirs. What ever become of 'em I don't know. But the descendants of that gang and the women prisoners are livin' there yet—outlaw white blood and high-toned white blood and nigger and Indian blood all mixed up together—and I've heard tell that some of 'em are handsome, specially the women. No, I never was in there myself——"

The memory-voice died and was lost. Vainly he racked his brain for more of the tale. Where did that man say the place was? In these Shawangunks? Farther south in the Ramapos? Up north in the Catskills, or far beyond in the Adirondacks? No answer came. The rest of the story, its beginning and end, were lost in the fog of many such chance conversations at odd moments and in odd places.

But he was sure that the locale of that legend was somewhere in the mountains of New York State. And out there across the Traps was a long mountain wall with but one way of entrance. And this girl's father and mother were of mongrel blood, and——

"By the Lord Harry, it fits!" he exclaimed aloud.

"If this isn't the place it ought to be. And there's been a lady—a real, high-bred lady—in your family not many generations ago, Miss Marion, or I'm a Chinaman!"

The surrounding rocks reverberated with his words. The blanket before him moved quickly. Out from it rose dancing gray eyes, glowing cheeks, and laughing red lips.

"Mornin', Mister Detective!" she caroled. "Are you talkin' into your sleep, or did you find a drink somewheres? You're foolish, sounds like."

Somewhat sheepish, he stood a moment without reply. His eyes dwelt on the wealth of tumbled hair, now glowing like forest fire in the clean light of the new day—no pale sandy tresses, but rich, vivid, Titian red. Nowhere in it showed dark streak or telltale kink.

"Listen," he countered. "Did you ever hear of a crowd of men—white and red and black—who went out through the Gap over yonder and brought in women and made slaves of them?"

At once her friendly face turned cold.

"You're huntin' into the wrong place," she told him, lifting her chin. "Our fellers don't do that. You better look somewheres else."

"Oh, shucks! Can't you get rid of that idea that I'm hunting somebody? These desperadoes were all dead long before we were born. But haven't you heard some such story from the old folks?"

After watching his frank face a moment she shook her head.

"No, never heard tell of such a thing. If they're all dead, what's the good of worryin' about 'em anyway?"

He shrugged and moved on toward the charred sticks, meanwhile turning the conversation into another channel.

"How's the ankle?"

She probed under the blanket, threw the covering aside, pushed herself up, and took a tentative step.

"Why, by mighty, mister! You're a reg'lar doctor! It's sore, but it ain't half as bad as 'twas. It hurt terrible last night when I——"

She stopped abruptly, but her eyes went to the entrance.

"When you came and covered me up? Serves you right. That was the most foolish thing—but I thank you, just the same."

Her lips opened, but for a moment no word came. Her eyes still were fixed on the narrow slit, and a little frown of concentration furrowed her brow. He pivoted and squinted against the glare of the rising sun now darting in at that crack. Then she spoke—low and tense.

"Where's your gun? Layin' there?"

"Yes."

"Go git it!"

He sprang for the passage, where the weapon still lay beside his discarded blanket. As he moved he heard a badly balanced stone outside grate under the weight of a moving body.

In a bounding rush he was across the open cavern and between the boulders. With a swoop he snatched up his gun. His clutching hand closed with one finger inside the trigger-guard.

* * *

BEFORE he realized that he was pressing the little curved lever, the gun jumped violently backward. A thundering report smashed out. Powder-gas stung his throat. The firearm fell with a sullen clack on the stones beside his feet.

Vaguely his deafened ears received the echo of the shot roaring along the farther wall of the Traps, a mile away. He felt, rather than heard, something fall among the rocks outside.

Grabbing the gun again, he slipped forward to the entrance. At the corners of the upstanding boulders he halted short, staring at a huddled form which had collapsed among the prone blocks beyond.

Only the head and upper torso of the stranger were visible, his lower body and legs lying behind a slanting stone. But clear in the sunlight showed a wan, pinched young face, swarthy-skinned, with close-cropped black hair. Along the stone under the head crept a red trickle.

Suddenly Douglas was thrown aside. From behind him Marion darted, wild-eyed. From her pale lips broke a sharp cry—

"Steve!"

Across the stones she struggled. Beside the youth she dropped. Then she turned to Douglas a face startling in its white wrath.

"You—murderin'—hound!" she choked. "You've kilt him!"

CHAPTER IV

THE FUGITIVE

DUMB, Douglas leaned his gun against the wall and moved outward.

"Don't you touch him!" blazed Marion. "Don't you put a hand onto him or I'll—I'll use that gun onto you! I might have knowed you was lyin'—if I'd knowed Steve was out I'd never trusted a word you said. Now you've got him, leave him to be buried where he was borned. Oh Steve, Stevie lad! And I—I give this feller the word to git his gun and do for you! If I'd only knowed you was out! Oh Stevie boy!"

In a storm of grief she dropped her head on the thin chest, hugging the limp lad to her with convulsive strength. A few feet away the blond man halted, dazed by the unintentional tragedy and the violence of the girl's outburst. For minutes he stood there motionless, hardly grasping the significance of her denunciation.

Then his brain began to work. Her words, repeating themselves, became appallingly plain. This young Steve was "out"—and his swarthy pallor was not merely that of unconsciousness or death: It was that of long confinement in some place whence he had just escaped—a place where hair was kept cropped. And he, Douglas Hampton, who had been half-accepted by this girl as the chance camper he claimed to be, now had become in her mind a far blacker monster than a mere detective—a merciless bloodhound who killed poor fugitives on sight. Gazing miserably on the mountain maid mourning her luckless boy lover, he found the sight unendurable. His head drooped, and his eyes rested unseeing on the stones between him and the pathetic pair.

Up overhead fluttered the yellowhammers, scared by the shot but emboldened by the ensuing silence to wheel about and whet their curiosity in scrutiny of the tragic group on the stones. High on the cliff behind, an unseen squirrel fussed and fumed; and from crack and cranny along the wall and from crevices among the fallen fragments more than one furtive little eye peered out. Steadily the sun slipped upward in the clean blue sky, lighting up in pitiless nakedness one more spectacle such as it had seen all too often in the long stretch of time since men first penetrated into this grim gulf. The wretched man neither heard nor saw any of these things. Stone-still he stood, staring down at a spattered splotch of white on a gray rock.

All at once his blank gaze focused sharply on that white spot. He started. In one stride he was beside the rock. As he stooped and squinted, a light flamed in his face. With a bound he was up and leaping toward the limp form beyond.

"Git away!" shrilled Marion, lifting a tear-swollen face and turning on him like a tigress. "Keep your bloody hands off him—he's mine! My onliest——"

"Listen to me!" he commanded. "I never hit him! The shot struck that stone yonder—the whole charge! It was an accident anyway—and he was out of line—

the shot couldn't hit him from where I stood. Let me see that wound."

For an instant she sat rigid, unable to believe, yet thrilled with hope. Quickly, but gently, he raised the head of the youth and probed the injury he found. Then he nodded vehemently.

"This is no gun-shot wound," he asserted. "It's a cut and a bump. He tumbled and knocked his head against a stone. Got a hard crack, but nothing dangerous. Poor kid, he looks half-starved, and that smash he took just finished him—for awhile. All he needs is water, food, rest, and safety. I'll give him all of them."

After one stare at the split scalp now turned toward her, she sprang up, her cheeks aglow with joy. But then she paused and shot a glance at the gun near by.

"And you'll take him back! No you won't—I'll——"

In the nick of time he caught her wrist as she started toward the weapon.

"Take him back where?" he snapped. "I'll take him nowhere, except back among the rocks. After he's able to walk he can go where he likes. He's nothing to me. If he's anything to you, don't stand in his way. I'm trying to help him. Now behave!"

She was tugging furiously away, but as he released her she stood where she was, fighting now against her distrust of him. He lifted the sagging body, got a firm grip, and lurched back toward the cliff. As he passed the shot-scarred stone he grunted and jerked his head downward toward it. Following, she paused an instant and studied the white patch, glanced at the little cañon, then moved on with clearer face. She knew well how shot-marks looked; saw, too, that the tall stranger had spoken truth when he said Steve was out of his line of fire from the walled passage. Though she had not seen the gun fired, she realized now that hardly any man would have made so poor a shot if he had actually been trying to hit the hunted youth.

Yet, when Douglas edged into the slit and bore his burden through, she halted behind him and put a tentative hand on the gun, still loaded in one barrel. Narrowly she inspected the "new-fangled" weapon—so unlike the ancient muzzle-loaders common in the Traps—wavering between a desire to draw its remaining charge and fear lest it might disastrously discharge again. After a dubious moment she shook her head and went on. She must trust this man, whether she would or not.

Down on the tumbled blanket and the bough-tip bed Douglas laid the youth. Then he reached for the canvas water-pail. Its lightness brought a frown to his brow. Hardly a cupful remained in it.

"I'll git somethin'," she volunteered, reading his thought.

Before he could fathom her purpose she was leaving through the passage, limping a little but moving as if sure of herself. Presently she returned, carefully bearing a jug.

"Well, you witch! Where did you dig up that?"

"That's one of the questions you better not ask round here," she parried. "Jest hold up his head while I give him a good snort."

SMILING grimly, he raised the lad's head and opened his lax mouth while she pulled the corn-cob plug. Deftly she put the nozzle to that mouth and poured the "snort." The aptness of the word was speedily demonstrated by the uncouth noise which erupted from Steve.

His eyes flew open, rolled, blinked. He coughed, sprayed a mouthful of the colorless but powerful liquor on his helpers, gasped, and struggled up as if kicked out of sleep. Wildly he stared at the two faces so near his. Then, as the girl put the jug again to his mouth, he grabbed it with both hands and gulped thirstily. When he lowered the vessel he licked his lips, and across them flitted a faint grin.

"——, am I dead or dreamin'?" he breathed hoarsely. "Marry! Be ye thar? An' this here licker—I'm a dunkey if 'tain't real! Who—who's this feller?"

His brown eyes glared into the cool blue ones. Involuntarily his right hand gripped the jug-handle as if it were a gun-stock. His gaunt face tightened into a menacing mask. He wavered like a mortally wounded wildcat gathering its last strength to spring.

"I'm all right, Steve," soothed Douglas. "I'm not after you. You're safe, and this is Marry, and that's real stuff in the jug. Calm down."

Under the steadying influence of the quiet tone the youth relaxed a little. Yet his lined mouth remained set as he demanded—

"Who shot at me?"

"Nobody," Douglas told him. "My gun went off accidentally. I didn't even see you. You fell and cracked your head."

The boy still glowered suspiciously, but when Marion spoke his gaze shifted to her.

"That's right, Steve. You're all right, 'cept a little cut and a bump. Tell me quick—how long you been out? Are they after you?"

A savage smile twisted the thin mouth.

"I dunno if they're trackin' me—I reckon so. I ain't seen 'em. I got 'way Monday night, an' I ain't goin' back till I git Snake Sanders. Cuss him, he put me away—an' I never done it, Marry, I never! It was Snake done it! An' I got the blame. Three year I been doin' time—but I'll take them three year outen him quick's I git to a gun! Yas, an' all the rest of his life too! I'll——"

"Don't you! He'll git you, not you git him. You might's well try to git a copperhead by grabbin' onto him with your bare hands. And you've got to keep out till the officers quit huntin'—they'll be into here, if they ain't here now. Don't you go near the house or a gun—don't move or make a noise till I tell you, or you're a goner! Now gimme that jug and I'll put it back. We've got to go quick to some other hide-out—there's been shootin' up here and we don't know who'll come—gimme that jug!"

"Not till I git 'nother big snort under my shirt," refused Steve, lifting the jug in unsteady hands. "I ain't et much for four days, an'——"

"Gimme that jug!" she stormed. "Know whose it is? Snake's!"

The boy started as if stung. His grip relaxed, and she yanked the jug from him and grabbed up the corn-cob. Douglas noticed, in an absent way, that the clay was smeared with a streak of green paint.

"Snake's? I been drinkin' that varmint's licker?" raged Steve. "I'd ruther lap up p'ison! Gimme that jug back! I'll bust it!"

"No you won't!" She backed off. "He's right round here now somewheres, I shouldn't wonder, a-sneakin' and a-slidin' along, and you've got to lay low awhile—you ain't even got a gun. I'm goin' to put this right back where 'twas. You keep quiet."

She hobbled away. Steve struggled to rise and overtake her, but found himself powerless in the grip of Douglas.

"Cool off, Steve," advised the blond man. "Think what a joke this is on Snake—you drinking up his licker. Wouldn't it make him mad?"

A sudden hard grin split the pallid face. Steve sank back.

"That's right, too — uh — what's yer name?"

"Call me Hamp."

"Hamp. Good 'nough. I dunno ye, an' ye don't b'long round here, but ye act right. Got anything to eat, Hamp? I been goin' a long time, an' it's 'most took the tuck outen me."

He began to blink a little uncertainly. The "licker" was fast getting in its work on his wofully empty stomach.

"Got a can of beans and some water, and they're yours."

"Gimme 'em!"

The demand crackled like an electric spark. The hard-set visage turned ravenous, and the wiry frame lifted itself and set its back against the wall. When Douglas tendered the opened can it was snatched and a quarter of its contents dumped into a grimy hand. An instant later the whole handful had been wolfed down and another was being stuffed into a fast-working mouth. When Marion came limping back from her mysterious pilgrimage only an empty tin and greasy lips remained to tell what had happened.

Unspeaking, the blond man opened another bean-can, put in a tin spoon, and handed it to the girl. She sank on a stone and began eating eagerly, but far more daintily than the boy. Douglas watched silently, but he nodded as he noted the instinctive difference in her way of feeding herself. Steve also watched, but with a different thought.

"Marry, ye're gittin' awful purty," he vouchsafed. "When I went 'way ye was thin's a rail, but now ye're han'some as a little red wagon. Ain't ye got a kiss for me?"

"Not till you wash your face, you dirty thing," she composedly answered.

He grinned and wiped his mouth on a tattered sleeve much too big for him.

"Where'd you git the clothes?" she demanded.

"Them?" He glanced down at threadbare coat, thin shirt, and ragged over-alls. "Found 'em into fellers' barns down yender. Hid my pen-clo'es into one feller's hay. Purty smart, hey?"

"Smart! Don't you know the officers'll

track you that way? They will, sure's you're livin'."

"They'll have a job findin' me now I've got here," he muttered, though plainly disconcerted. "'Less'n somebody blabs."

Brown eyes and gray eyes switched to the quiet man who sat taking it all in.

"Don't worry," said he. "I haven't seen you folks at all—either of you."

After a narrow stare Steve nodded slightly. Not another word was spoken until the meager meal was finished and the water-bag was totally empty. Then Marion took command of the situation.

"We'll be goin' now," she stated, rising. "No, don't come with us. Steve and me, we'll go 'long by our own selves, and then you won't know what's 'come of us if anybody should ask you. We're awful obliged to you, stranger, and we wish you good luck. G'by."

"I'm not saying good-by. I'm staying here, as I told you before. Maybe we'll meet again."

She took several halting steps outward before responding, Steve trailing silently behind her. At the edge of the cañon she paused and spoke over one shoulder:

"If you're stayin', don't stay *here*. It's no place. You'll be better off down below. There's Jake Dalton's place, down towards the Clove, where nobody lives any more, and you could go into there and live pretty safe and comf'table if you mind your own business—and if the ha'nt don't git you."

"O-ho! A haunted house!"

"So they say. Jake, he got kilt last Spring by somethin'—nobody knows what. They found him after he'd been dead a week or so, and they couldn't look at him right close. But he wasn't shot or cut or clawed—he was jest swelled up terrible. Two or three fellers stayed into his house since, and they got drove out—somethin' was there that they didn't see, but they could hear it and *feel* it. Some say it's Jake's ha'nt. Others say it ain't Jake but the thing that kilt him. If you want to try livin' there nobody's likely to bother you much. It sets on the left of the Clove road, down yonder, with two big pines back of it.

"Now we're goin'. Oh, and one other thing—you better not come round Nigger Nat's house. He ain't sociable. G'by."

Out through the crack they passed. For a minute or two the blond man sat looking moodily at the exit. Then he arose and followed.

The rocks outside were vacant. The trees and undergrowth showed no sign of life. Even the curious yellowhammers were gone. Nowhere, except on two stones—one scarred by shot, one stained with blood—was anything to show that since the last sunset two young hill-folk had come suddenly into the life of Douglas Hampton and as swiftly vanished from it.

"Well," he muttered, picking up his gun and turning back, "Steve, you tough young wolf, you don't know how lucky you are. I only hope you'll treat her right in the years to come."

CHAPTER V

CREEPING THINGS

UP ON the brink of Dickie Barre, on a triangular outcrop of stone bare of brush but topped by whispering pines, Douglas lounged in luxurious content, basking in the mellow warmth of September sun.

Behind him his pack leaned against the base of a pine. Beside him lay his gun. Before him stretched the long panorama of the Traps.

From the half-naked rock of Millbrook Mountain, where the rim of the great bowl curved westward to merge into the Minnewaska steeps, to the castle-like peak of Sky Top, beneath which the strange lake of Mohonk nestled out of sight in a cup of sheer stone, rambled the top of the Great Wall. Northward from Sky Top it dipped downward in a long sweep, and there the east-swinging wall of Dickie Barre seemed to close in and complete the unbroken ring of uplands surrounding the forested chasm. But the man loafing up on the breezy point knew that such was not the case.

Though he had not yet traveled in that direction, he had been studying a couple of squares of Government topographic map, of which several were in his ditty-bag; and he knew that the walls did not close. They pinched together into a narrow ravine, then veered apart again, each pursuing its own way into the north until it became only a series of rounded knolls sinking into the other low hills beyond. And that ravine, or perhaps the wider valley floor beyond, must be the Clove of which Marion Oaks had spoken.

Through that ravine and on into the north, the map said, ran a road—the inside road of the Traps; and along that roadline, at wide intervals, were the little square symbols which, to the topographer, signify "houses." One of those dots must be the house where Jake Dalton had lived before he was found "swelled up terrible;" where now even the hard sons of the craggy hills dared not sleep because of the fearful thing which could not be seen but could be felt. Before sundown, the lone blond man intended, he would find that house and see whether it was fit for habitation. If so, he meant to inhabit it, ha'nt or no ha'nt.

Everything impelled him toward that house. To live continuously among the boulders where he had stayed last night was neither comfortable nor sensible: The place was too far from water, from food, from human associates; and when the drenching Fall rains should come, as they might at any time, he would be almost unprotected.

For sinister purposes, for the concealment of nameless activities and of wanted men, the maze of cliff-blocks was ideal; but for the steady residence of a man who dodged neither law-makers nor law-breakers it was the reverse. And to a red-blooded, two-handed fellow like Douglas Hampton the story of the uncanny house was enough. Had it been an even poorer place than his rocky lair, he would have journeyed thither to seek the solution of its mystery.

But the day was far from old, and there was time to loaf and look and bask and think, unworried by necessity. Here was none of the rush and drive of the city, the scurry to fill assignments, the fret and fume of the hordes of business-slaves hurtling overground and underground in ant-like activity. Here was nothing to do but relax, absorbing the golden sunlight and the green beauty of nature and the clinking music of unseen hammers far below and far away on the Mohonk slope, where millstone-makers were rifting rock in their little quarries. What though one had no habitation? What though his food was almost gone and the pipe dangling from the corner of his mouth was empty? Time enough to seek shelter when night approached; time enough to rustle for food when the last crumb had vanished. Now was the hour to let his city-starved soul feast on freedom.

So he leaned there on an elbow, blinking outward and downward at the varying verdure of the hardwood forests, the red spots of sumac and the orange tips of goldenrod brightening the little fields, the tiny houses dotting the openings, the little ribbons of smoke drifting away from their chimneys.

His thoughts moved in a slow circle—from Marion to Steve, from Steve to the haunted house, from the haunted house to the legend of the long-dead outlaw gang, from the gang to its women prisoners, and so back again to Marion. Where was she now? Down in one of those houses, beaten and sworn at for running away? Much nearer, still talking with her escaped-convict lover in the "hide-out" to which she had taken him? Limping along somewhere in the masking brush, forgetful of pain, thinking only of bringing food to the worn-out fugitive? Only the labyrinth below could tell; and it was not in the habit of telling tales about its children.

And this Snake Sanders, who had wriggled out of the way of officers and let a boy suffer the penalty of some unknown crime—who and what was he? The thinker, accustomed to studying faces and voices, felt that Steve's denial of guilt and denunciation of Snake were genuine. His virulent hatred, his vicious threat against that man, were those of the bitterly wronged. Yet Marion, herself swift-tempered and courageous, had shown that she feared this Snake, who might be "a-sneakin' and a-slidin'" along near at hand——

THE blond man grew tense. Something *was* sneaking along, though not very near. Something was creeping stealthily toward him from the thick growth behind; something which made no footfall, but which caused a slight difference in the rustling of the breeze-kissed leaves.

He started to turn his head, then checked the movement. He felt that he would see nothing; that the creature was traveling with Indian stealth, keeping itself masked; that his look behind would only warn the sinister thing that its approach was known. He was lying dangerously close to the edge, and his nerves shouted to him to get back while there was time. But he held himself where he was.

His eyes flicked downward at his gun.

Then he carelessly raised himself to a sitting position, took his pipe from his mouth and glanced at it, put it back, and let his hand stray down to his shirt pocket. It hovered there a moment, then sank loosely as if empty. But cupped in his palm now was a little round mirror.

Casual though his movements had been, the soft rustle of progress had ceased. Only the little flutterings caused by wandering air-currents came to him. As he sat still, however, apparently absorbed in contemplation of the scene below, it recommenced. Slowly, imperceptibly, he turned his hand, slanting the mirror up and down by degrees, watching it from the corner of his eye. It was a schoolboy trick which he had used more than once in later years when desirous of seeing something behind without turning his head. And now, listening keenly and moving the telltale glass with practised hand, he soon located the advancing thing behind the pine, some ten feet away, where his pack lay.

It was creeping now on the ground, free from the brush beyond but still unseen; keeping itself concealed behind pack and pine, making only a slight slither as it came. The sound died. For a long minute all was quiet. Then, slowly, above the edge of the pack rose a hat.

Shapeless, dingy felt it was, with a ragged hole below its crown. Under its brim glimmered black eyes, beady and cold as those of a reptile. Little by little the nose came up into view—a flat, wide nose with something of the triangularity of a snake's head. There it poised, mouth and jaw hidden behind the bulk of the pack.

The opaque eyes fixed greedily on the new shotgun lying beside the watcher's leg. Then they returned to the back and shoulders of the blond man, and the lids narrowed into wicked slits. The nose drew downward, the eyes followed, the hat faded. Above the pack nothing showed except the low branches of the pine.

Little sounds of movement came—of movement but not of advance. Douglas moved the mirror to right and left of the lump of blankets. His fingers grew rigid. Something had appeared beside the pack—a light but strong box, from which a dirty black-haired hand was lifting a lid. As that lid arose the box was tilted so that its top became an open side, facing toward the man on the brink. And out from it crawled a big copperhead.

Head raised, it glided forward a foot or two and stopped, its tail still in the box, which lay motionless. Its venomous eyes focused on the still figure of the man beyond, who remained as rigid as the rock on which he sat. Its tongue ran out and vibrated in menace. Slowly it slipped forward a little farther, then paused again. Douglas braced himself to snatch up his gun, whirl, and fire the instant its approach was resumed. But it was not resumed.

Instead, the repulsive creature lay quiet, absorbing the warmth of rock and sun. Minutes passed, and it made no move. Then from beyond the pack came a faint sibilant sound—an almost inaudible noise which was not hiss nor breath nor whistle, but something of all three, and which seemed to arouse the reptile. It turned, and crept sluggishly toward the spot whence the sound had come.

Twice that indescribable sibilance was repeated, and the snake moved on in its deliberate, fat-bodied way. Just then a sudden gust of wind swooped playfully along the brink, startling the leaves into a flapping chorus like the beating wings of trapped birds. The hideous thing on the ground slid around the pack, paused, was gone.

Douglas drew a long breath and became aware that his shirt was clammy with cold perspiration. A chill shivered down his back. Moving the glass, he scanned all around and above that pack. Nothing showed. The gust of wind fled along on its frolicsome way, and all grew quiet. No sound came from behind the pine.

Still controlling his movements, he looked casually around, then arose as if tired of sitting. As he stood up, however, his gun was in one hand, and he loosely swung its twin muzzles to cover the pack. Feigning a yawn, he stepped lazily toward the pine, dropping the mirror into a trousers pocket as he moved. With a quiet click his safety-catch slid, and two solid charges—of buckshot—were ready for instant use.

A good stride away from the blankets he turned aside and drifted around the butt of the pine. Then he halted, sorely puzzled. The man who should have been lurking there was not. The box, too, had vanished. Not even the snake——

But yes, the snake was there. It was

curled just below and behind the pack, hidden from any eye except one searching for it; three feet of silent death, ready to strike its fangs into the hands of the man stooping to lift his back-burden before slinging it on his shoulders. Even now, with that man's eyes on it, it was poising in venomous alertness, its tongue vibrating again like a blur.

Douglas stepped onward a little, lifted his gun, and fired. The snake rolled writhing away, blown apart. Instantly he wheeled, the other barrel ready to meet any menace. But still nothing showed itself. The growth beyond seemed empty.

Warily watching, he stepped to his pack, swung it up one-handed, and stood a minute longer scanning his surroundings. Seeing nothing new, he got into the straps and strode away. Only a few rods to his left, he knew, ran a faint trail—the path by which he had come here after finding a steep slope which had enabled him to climb Dickie Barre. The trail would be empty, of course; the skulking assassin in the felt hat would be so cunningly hidden in the encompassing tangle that no mere stranger could find him. No use hunting him.

BUT as he emerged into that path he stopped, startled. There, only a few feet away, stood the man.

So astounded by the other's audacity was Douglas that he stood gaping. The sinister hillman grinned guilelessly.

"Howdy, stranger!" he greeted. "Scairt ye, did I? Was that ye a-shootin' jest now?"

Douglas swallowed an impulse to leap at him. Still amazed, he glanced rapidly over him. Below the ophidian eyes and flat nose which he had seen before, he now noted a coarse mouth, tobacco-yellowed teeth, scraggly black beard about a week old, long lean frame, and nondescript garments. His curving hands were empty. His snake-box was not with him now. Nor had he any gun.

The man moved slightly, shifting a foot. In the movement was something reptilian—a sinuous smoothness that was serpentine. And in the short sentences which he had just spoken was a repellent hiss.

"Howdy yourself!" growled Douglas. "What are you doing here?"

"Jest a-ramblin' round, stranger. Might ast ye the same. What was ye shootin'?"

"Snake."

Douglas gave him a hard look.

"Yeh? Huh! Awful waste o' powder. Us fellers use sticks onto them things. Thought mebbe ye got what ye're into here for."

A cunning wink followed his last utterance.

"Meaning?"

The yellow teeth bared themselves in a wide, silent laugh. But the beady eyes held no mirth.

"Think I dunno ye? Huh! I ain't no fool. Ye ain't here jest to look at rocks an' things. Trouble is, ye dunno this kentry an' how to work it. None o' ye do. Everybody into the place knowed days ago ye was here, an' ye'll never git yer man 'less'n ye do business. I'm the feller to do business with."

Again the cunning wink.

"Meaning?" repeated Douglas.

"Huh! Ye know. We'll work shares. I'll toll yer man to ye for half the reward. Who d'ye want? How much's he wuth?"

The blond man bit back a sudden desire to grin.

"Who are you?" he countered.

"Me? Snake Sanders."

CHAPTER VI

THE KNOCKOUT

DOUGLAS deliberately swung the pack from his back and dropped it. Against it he leaned his gun, making sure, as he did so, that he had restored the safety-lock. As he faced Snake Sanders he caught the black eyes fixed again on the weapon, and in them glinted the same light of cupidity which had been there before.

"Right purty gun ye've got, stranger," Snake said admiringly. "Don't look sensible, though, without no hammers onto it. What's one o' them guns cost?"

"Oh, several dollars. But what about this business of yours?"

"It's like I tell ye." Snake dragged his gaze away from the shotgun. "Do business with me an' ye'll git what ye want. Otherways ye git nothin'—but trouble."

"So? And who'll make the trouble? You?"

"Me? Huh! I don't have to. Ye'll jest fall into it."

"Fall into it. Sure it won't come crawling up on me from behind?"

The black lashes flickered.

"What ye mean by that?"

"Your name's Snake."

Sanders' beady stare beat into his inscrutable face. Presently the serpentine man grinned and subtly relaxed.

"Names don't hurt. Think I'd try to do ye after I got my money, mebbe? That ain't my way, stranger. Folks calls me Snake 'cause I can handle snakes. They don't never bite me. I can tromp right round 'em into my bare feet, an' pick 'em up into my bare hands, an' they lemme alone. I can talk to 'em—snake talk—an' they mind. If I'd of been over yender 'fore ye kilt that snake o' yourn, now, I could have sent him away jest by talkin' to him."

His gaze never wavered as he talked. He gave no sign of guilt. Unaware that he had been observed in the little round mirror, he was sure there was nothing to connect him in this man's mind with the fact that a copperhead had lurked beside the pack, and he was bold enough to make capital of the presence of that reptile. Evidently he was proud both of his name and his diabolical gift.

"Ye must have hearn o' me," he went on. "I've done business before. Nobody round here knows it, o' course. I keep my tracks covered. But they must have told ye outside 'bout Snake Sanders. I'm him."

Douglas kept the disgust out of his face. He wanted to know just how deep was this man's duplicity. He had not yet learned that it was absolutely bottomless.

"I've heard the name. People around here don't monkey with you much, do they?"

A hissing laugh came through the yellow teeth, and for once the eyes showed a glint of amusement.

"No they don't. I've got this hull place right into my hand, mister. Folks step wide o' me. Some fellers has got brash an' throwed buckshot at me, but they don't no more. They're dead. Others has learnt."

"I see. Those fellows stepped on snakes, maybe?"

"Mebbe. I ain't sayin'. But come on, stranger, we can't talk here all day. Who d'ye want? How much?"

"I think," was the slow answer, "that the party I'm interested in just now is out of reach."

Snake looked blank. Reaching smoothly into a pocket, he drew out a plug of tobacco, bit off a chunk, and chewed.

"Got away clean, ye mean. Ain't into here nowheres? Huh! Don't be too sure. Ther's lots o' hide-outs into here that ye dunno 'bout. I know 'em. I can git anybody—man, woman, or chile. An' there's more'n one way to skin a skunk. If yer man ain't too well knowed, why won't 'nother man do?"

Again the insinuating wink.

"Meaning?"

"Aw, come off! Ye know. Fix it onto some feller we can git. Take him out, fix up yer case, railroad him an' git yer money. Think I dunno how you detectives work? Ye must think I'm simple. It's done right 'long—grab a feller that ain't got no friends an' send him up. What chance has a feller here got when he gits drug into the courts outside? Puh!"

He expectorated profusely and waited.

Douglas laughed out in contempt. He took a couple of slow strides forward. Snake shifted again, and his eyes narrowed once more.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," the blond man derided. "I'm no detective. I'm hunting nobody. I'm in here for—my health. See?"

Snake saw—or thought he did. Instantly he changed front.

"I knowed it. Ye needn't jump onto me, now. I was jest a-tryin' ye out. If ye was a real detective ye'd be down snoopin' round houses, not a-hidin' out up here. Wal, ye come to the right place, stranger. Where ye from? What'd ye do? Go on, tell a feller. I'll keep it dark. Got money, o' course. Gimme some an' I'll fetch ye all the feed ye want."

"And fetch the officers along too, when they come."

"Aw no. That talk I jest give ye was all moonshine—not a true word into it. I was jest makin' sure o' ye, I tell ye. Now I know ye I'll——"

"Shut up!" Hampton's anger broke out. "I've been making sure of you, too. You're a liar. You're a treacherous sneak. You'd sell a hunted man to me—you'd sell an innocent man to me—you'd sell me, too. You think I'm after somebody, eh? Well, you're right. I'm after the man who thought he was going to get my gun and money, the man who didn't get them and is trying to trap me now, the man who sneaked up and let that copperhead out of the box! I'm after Snake Sanders. And I've got him!"

So rapid had been his words, so swift was his following leap, that Snake stood flat-footed as a big fist smacked into his face. He was knocked headlong backward.

* * *

INTO the bushes he sprawled with a crash of breaking branch and twig. Into the bushes Douglas jumped after him. But Sanders, though dazed by the impact of the blow and the shock of finding himself caught, was neither senseless nor helpless. He wriggled over and seemed to curve upward. Head-first, like a striking reptile, he threw himself at the legs of the man above. His punisher lurched over him and fell.

Snake's lean frame wriggled forward again and started up. But he was not quite free. Without waiting to rise, Douglas darted a hand backward and clamped it around one bare ankle. Holding his grip, he rolled over, twisting and yanking the trapped leg.

The hillman tottered and lost his footing. But even before he hit the ground for the second time he lashed out in air with his free foot. His heel thumped into the blond man's face, snapping his head back like a fish-blow. Hissing furiously, Snake jerked up his leg and let drive again. The fierce foot-punch missed this time, for its mark had ducked aside and the leg shot over Douglas' shoulder. Promptly it was seized, held, forced down.

Both men now were in a grotesque posture for fighting. Snake's legs were spread, with his antagonist sitting between them and clutching a foot on each side, while Snake himself sat on one booted ankle, pinning it down. But the advantage was decidedly with Sanders, for both his hands were free. He shot them straight for the other's throat.

His arms were struck up and his savage clutch failed. His feet were freed, but the hands which had gripped them were now fists, shooting arm-jolts into his jaw. And, short though those blows were, they crunched his teeth together with a force that made him blink groggily and throw himself aside.

An instant later Snake found himself grappled. Douglas was clinching him, shoving him down, striving for a leg-hold with his knees and relentlessly forcing one of his arms up behind his back. Douglas' eyes were ablaze with wrath, and his jaw set like a rock. Now he had this treacherous reptile in a real grip, and he meant to smash him. And Snake, reading the grim purpose in the face of the man against whose back he had loosed creeping death, felt fear stab through him.

Heretofore the sinister hillman had fought only in a flurry of surprize and rage—though he would not have neglected to make his work complete if once he got the upper hand. Now the fury of desperation fired him. He snaked himself over sidewise, wriggled a leg loose, twined it around the booted leg beside it, and, by a curling twist, eased the strain on his pinioned arm. His yellow fangs fixed themselves in his enemy's shoulder. His free hand clawed for the blue eyes.

Douglas released his arm-hold, evaded the gouging nails by a backward jerk of the head, got both hands to his foe's throat and tore him loose. Both scrambled to their knees and up on their feet. Both struck with savage fists at the same instant. Both blows landed.

Squarely between the eyes Snake's knotty fist cracked. Douglas saw a red flash, followed by floating rings of flame. His own knuckles tingled from their impact with a bristly chin. Vaguely he saw the face beyond the wavering fire-spots fade backward. His other fist, swinging for it, hit nothing.

For an instant he dug his knuckles into his eyes, trying to clear his sight. Then he squinted around. Snake was down again, clawing at the ground, trying to rise. He jumped for him—stubbed a toe against an unnoticed rock—stumbled and sprawled.

As he pushed himself up, raging, Snake got to his haunches and lurched at him in a clinch. Douglas threw himself into the wiry arms and grappled for a hold of his own. And then for a few minutes it was a straining, kicking, punching rough-and-tumble, each fighting with all he had.

Again and again each secured a throat-hold but lost it. Over they rolled, kicking whenever a foot came free, slugging with either fist or both, striving to dash each other's head against stone or root, heaving and wrenching until they had tumbled out of the brush and into the trail where they had first stood. In Douglas grew amazement at the strength and endurance of his antagonist. In Snake's brain gnawed a keener fear of the man on whom he had exhausted in vain every foul trick he knew. Neither could quite overcome the other. Both were gasping and growing dizzy from the violence of their combat. And they fought on.

Suddenly, in a final squirming spasm, Snake twisted himself free. Before Douglas could clutch him again he had rolled away and was shoving himself up. The blond man got his feet under him and pitched to a stand. Then, too short of breath to renew the duel at once, they balanced themselves and glowered.

Snake was a hard sight, and Douglas was not much better. The hillman's face was gashed by cuts and smeared with mingled blood and tobacco-juice, his right eye was shut, his mouth was a blubbery pulp, his clothes hung in rags. The other's bloodshot eyes gleamed between puffy lids, his nose leaked a red drizzle, his light hair was stained from a cut scalp and full of dirt, his shirt was ripped to the waist and crimsoned at the shoulder where Snake's teeth had sunk. But neither saw anything except the menace in the other's eyes.

The same thought came to both—probably born in the vindictive brain of Snake and involuntarily transmitted by his look: The thought of the gun leaning against the pack. True, it was "new-fangled," and Douglas knew it was locked against discharge; but in a fight a gun is not only a gun but a steel bar and a club. It was behind its owner, and a swift dash past him might make Snake its master. He attempted the dash.

Without the slightest preliminary movement he was speeding past Douglas. But the latter was not asleep. Pivoting on a heel, he swung a round-arm blow flush under the passing jaw.

The shock was terrific. Between the impetus of Snake's plunge and the body-drive of the punch, the impact was more than doubled. The slugging arm dropped, numb to the shoulder. Snake also dropped—numb all over.

His feet left the ground, and he straightened backward in the air. Flat on his back he struck, arms at his sides, legs stretched nerveless, head a little to the right, blank face turned to the brush. There he lay without a quiver of life.

Douglas stood peering down, slowly swinging his numbed arm at his side. Minutes passed. His breathing grew normal; his arm lost its wooden feeling. Somewhere a bird chirped noisily. Up from the unseen chasm of the Traps idled a new breeze, bearing the music of the far-off hammers. The warm sun beat down on the two men. Still Snake Sanders lay motionless.

The swollen-eyed man above him trod tentatively on a grimy hand. It gave no answering twitch. He stooped, studied the face, put a thumb on the left lid, pushed it up, and peered at the eye-ball. Then he stood up, unconsciously rubbing his thumb against his shirt.

"Well, Mister Snake Sanders," he said grimly, "if I were you and you were I, you'd drag me over to the edge and pitch me off to smash on the rocks, most likely. That's what I ought to do to you. But I don't happen to be built along those lines. Just what can a white man do with a reptile like you under such circumstances?"

The problem remained unanswered, though he ran a hand repeatedly through his thick hair and frowned down at the body.

"If I could only have hit you harder, maybe you'd die of a broken neck," he mused, "I've known such things to happen. But I did the best I could, and you'll live just the same. The devil takes care of his own, anyway."

Slowly he turned and walked to his pack. Deliberately he got into the straps, wincing as the injured shoulder came under pressure.

"Must wash that place well when I reach the creek," he muttered, "or I'll get blood-poisoning. Guess a complete bath wouldn't be inappropriate."

He settled the pack, gripped his gun, stepped to the edge of the brush, and picked up his hat. Then he looked again at the silent Snake.

"On the whole, I think I have a good deal the best of it," he declared. "Your little copperhead trick did me no harm, and I know a lot more now than if you hadn't tried it. Yes, a whole lot. As for damages to our respective complexions and temperaments, I'm no worse off than you; and in the matter of general condition you're certainly much worse than I. So we'll call it quits—for the present."

He plodded away. But after a few steps he looked back with a hard smile.

"Besides," he concluded, "I was forgetting. Our young friend Steve has some business to settle with you. His account is three years old—maybe more—and mine has only just begun. So you're Steve's meat, Snake. Steve's meat."

CHAPTER VII

A MAN MEETS A MAN

ALONG the Clove road plodded a man with a battered face and a torn shirt, toting a pack and a gun. The face was not so much disfigured as it had been awhile ago, for it had just been laved in the cold, clear water of Coxing Kill; but it still bore obvious marks of conflict, chief of which was a pair of puffy eyes ringed by darkening discolorations. The rent shirt gaped at every stride, disregarded by its wearer, who swung along as if careless of the opinions of others. Judging from his gait, he knew where he was going and purposed to reach his destination before early sundown should cut off the light from his ridge-flanked road.

Behind him, perhaps a quarter-mile back, another man was riding in the same direction on the same road. A big-framed, eagle-nosed, long-jawed old man he was, with white mustache drooping around his mouth and ragged wisps of snowy hair sticking out from under his nondescript felt hat. His shoulders, though humped up as he lounged forward on the reins lying loosely along the back of a white horse, were wide and bulky; and the gnarled hands holding those reins were corded with sinew. Seventy if a day, he still looked powerful enough to handle many a man of half his years; and the direct gaze of his steely blue eyes betokened fearlessness of heart, simplicity of nature, and honesty of soul.

Neither of the two men saw the other. Between them intervened windings of the tree-lined road; the tramping man cast no glance behind, and the one following was not looking for him. Each in his own little cloud of dust, the pair ambled on and drew steadily nearer to a dingy house, behind which a man and a woman were harvesting corn.

At the swinging approach of the pack-bearer the couple halted their toil and squinted at him. He waved a jaunty hand. Neither of the harvesters answered the friendly gesture. In slouching attitude they stood, wooden-faced, watching him pass. With a careless smile he looked them over, then turned his gaze forward and ignored them.

Had he been let alone, he would have passed without a word and speedily forgotten them. But, though the couple made no threatening move, they had animals which did. With a sudden bound three dogs appeared from nowhere and silently rushed at him.

They were treacherous-looking mongrel beasts, and their teeth gleamed wickedly as they came. The man halted—took one comprehensive look—stepped back and lifted his gun.

"Call 'em off!" he barked. "Call 'em or bury 'em!"

A shrill shriek of command burst from the woman. A sour snarl broke from the man. At the sound of the shrewish voice and the menace of the gun the dogs slowed abruptly. But they growled, and they did not turn back.

"Call 'em off, I said!" commanded the man behind the gun. "When I say off I mean off! Drive them back and tie them up!"

Instead, the man advanced, muttering. His brown face, of distinctly negro cast, was ugly; and he still gripped his corn-knife—an abbreviated scythe, short-handled, which would be a fearful weapon at close quarters. The dogs, emboldened by his approach, began slipping forward again.

"You can keep back too," the stranger warned. "This gun is likely to scatter right at you. Take those beasts away quick if you want them to live. I won't say it again."

"Shoot them dawgs an' ye won't git fur from here," the other snarled throatily.

But he paused, and at the cessation of his steps the brutes also stopped. The woman still stood in the corn.

Just then the white horse and its white-haired driver came jogging around a bushy turn. The old man sat up with sudden energy, involuntarily jerking at the reins. The horse stopped.

One swift survey the old man took. Then his right hand shot to the whip-socket, and with awkward speed he clambered out into the road.

"Nat!" he yelled explosively. "Git them dawgs in or I'll give the hull pack o' ye a hidin'! Shoot 'em if ye want, stranger—they aint none of 'em no good!"

Douglas, his finger already tightening on one trigger, held his fire and flicked a glance sidewise to see what sort of man was coming. He found the old fellow running nimbly toward him, reversing his whip so that its heavy butt was foremost. At that instant the man Nat, his eyes glinting viciously, hissed at the dogs.

"Look ou-u-ut!" yelled the oncoming driver.

* * *

IN THE nick of time Douglas turned his eyes back—just as a dog left the ground in a fang-grinning leap. The other two were crouching. The blond man jerked his gun a little downward to meet the rising body. The dog's breast struck against the muzzles. Teeth clashed in a fierce snap. From the gun burst a muffled roar. The dog was blown backward.

Under the impact of dog and powder-recoil Douglas staggered. But he gave no ground and lost no time. His second finger released the other hidden hammer at an up-shooting shape. In a crashing flare another hairy form whirled over and flopped to earth.

At the same instant teeth stung his left side. A sudden weight on his shirt yanked him almost off balance. Under his arm he found the wicked face of the third hound. Then a black streak appeared on that dog's head, a resounding thwack hit Douglas' ears, and the beast dangled limp, held up only by its teeth, which were caught in the cloth.

"I told ye, Nat—I told ye!" panted the old man, whose whip-butt had knocked out that third dog. "I been tellin' ye right 'long— Git back, ye yeller hound!"

Mouthing an inarticulate oath, the owner of the dogs himself was now jumping forward, face convulsed and corn-hook lifted. Whether he was attacking Douglas or his aged rescuer neither stopped to ascertain. Both acted. The empty shotgun jabbed for the assailant's face, the barrels crunching solidly against his forehead. The whip-butt swung down with the force of a black-jack on his crown. His eyes rolled, his legs caved, and he fell.

The young man and the old one swept their surroundings. Two dogs were fairly blown apart. The third still hung limp from Douglas's shirt. The man lay in a queer huddle, his corn-hook sticking in the ground beside him, where it had fallen on its point. The woman, shrieking with rage, now was running at them with a similar blade.

"I told ye, Nat," the old man said harshly, as if the fallen man could hear him, "if ye didn't learn them dogs manners or tie 'em up somebody'd fix 'em. I told ye I'd do it myself the next time they come for me. Ye can say g'by to this here one too."

Wherewith he clutched the dangling hound by the scruff of the neck and, in one wrench, tore it away from Douglas' shirt. He flung it down, hopped up, and landed with all his weight on the brute's neck. Under his heavy brogans sounded a crack of bones.

"'Lizy, ye better hold yer hosses," he coolly cautioned the woman, now close at hand. "I don't want to handle ye rough, but sure's God made little apples I'll crack ye one 'less'n ye drop that 'ere cawn-hook. I'm a-warnin' ye."

The thin-faced female, whose coarse hair and high cheekbones hinted strongly at Indian blood, screamed out again. She burst into a torrent of vituperation that brought a red wave across the face of the younger man and a corresponding flush into the leathery cheeks of his fighting-mate. But she made no attack with the ugly blade in her hand. Standing over the huddled Nat, her bony bare toes digging at the turf like the claws of a cat, she vented her fury in language which would have brought swift physical retaliation if she had been a man. And the pair stood silent and took it.

"Ye'll pay for them pups, Eb Wilham—ye'll pay dear!" she foamed at the last. "Nat'll take it outen ye! Him an' Snake'll fix ye—an' ye too, ye sneakin' 'tective! Ye mizzable pair o' sneakers, ye better live together an' sleep together an' watch out fer each other now!"

She bent and squinted at her mate. The two men looked suddenly at each other. The hillman stared as if seeing the other for the first time. The newcomer stared straight back, taking his first comprehensive view of the two-handed old fellow and realizing what the woman's threat signified. For a minute old blue eye and young blue eye held straight and steady. Then on each mouth quirked a smile.

"If you've run out of words, I'll say a few myself," clipped Douglas, turning to the woman. "If there's any more trouble coming from this it comes to me, not to him. I never saw him before, and he doesn't know me. So you can tell your nigger man to take it out on me. As for Snake, I knocked him cold awhile ago and I can do it again. I'll be around here for some time, and anybody wanting the same dose Snake got can come and get it. That's all."

He nodded to the old man and turned away. He took three steps before Eb Wilham stopped him.

"Hol' on!" the latter exploded in the abrupt way that seemed habitual. "I'm a-travelin' your way. If ye want a ride, set in. 'Lizy, git some sense. This feller's right—I dunno him. But I'm a-goin' to know him if he's willin'. An' as fur's Nat an' Snake's concerned, I been takin' care o' myself seventy-three year an' I figger to keep on doin' it. What say, stranger? Walk or ride?"

"Ride, if it doesn't get you into trouble," Douglas acquiesced.

"No trouble. Snakes an' yeller dawgs has bit at me before, an' I ain't dead. *Chk!* Hoss, g'yapalong! G'yap, I tell ye!"

THE white horse, sedately cropping grass, took a few last bites and came obediently. His master climbed spryly into the weather-beaten wagon and rolled an equally weather-beaten thumb at the rear. Douglas heaved his pack in behind and swung himself to the seat beside the driver.

The sharp-faced female screamed out with a fresh burst of abuse. Old Eb's mouth tightened, and he lightly touched the horse with his whip. The animal jumped in an astonished way and began slowly, heavily pounding along the road. Woman, man, dogs and house disappeared behind in a drifting cloud of dust.

"Ain't no use listenin' or talkin' to a mad woman," Eb barked conversationally. "Ain't no use into it at all. Uh—right fine weather we're a-havin', stranger."

"Right fine," agreed Douglas. "Aren't you worried about riding with a detective, Mr. Wilham?"

The keen eyes shot at him and returned to the horse.

"Not a mite. I ride with who I want to. Folks that's scairt o' detectives mostly has some reason to be. I ain't got no reason."

"Found—one honest man in the Traps," laughed Douglas.

"That ain't nothin'," Eb retorted. "Folks is mostly honest round here. Good hard-workin' fellers. Don't jedge the rest of us by them Oakses. Or Snake Sanders. Did ye say ye licked Snake?"

Getting no answer at once, he took another survey of his passenger. Douglas was staring at the road. So the hard pair behind were "them Oakses"—the parents of the catamount girl!

"Er—oh, yes. Laid him out on top of that ledge back yonder. Ought to have thrown him off. But I didn't."

The horse thumped out a dozen steps while Eb digested this.

"Ye're right, stranger. Snake's a bad 'un. Ye must o' had a hard tussle—Snake ain't easy to handle." The shrewd eyes took in the battered face. "Up top o' Dickabar, hey? Hum!"

He became abstracted. The horse jogged on, steadily eating up distance. The silence grew strained.

"Mr. Wilham, I'm no detective," Douglas asserted. "I'm just a rambler who blundered in here. My name's Douglas Hampton. I'm not after anybody, and I'm staying awhile just because I like this country. I don't know who started this fool story that I'm a detective, and I don't care much. But now I'm here, I'll stay until I'm ready to go—unless I get starved out; I haven't much left to eat. That's all there is to it. Believe it or not. It's true."

The heavy hoofs beat another measure.

"I believe ye," aggressively. "I know how ye feel. I'm full o' that same kind o' cussedness myself. Thar's some folks round here that's ignorant an' scairt of any new feller, an' thar's some that's got reasons besides bein' ignorant. I ain't sayin' who they be; I ain't talkin' 'bout my neighbors even if I don't like some of 'em. But seein' it's gone round that ye're a detective, most everybody'll believe it, an' ye better act accordin'—kind o' go careful, I mean. Where ye stayin'? Anywheres special?"

"Up in the rocks last night. Thought I might find a house I could live in down here. Know of any?"

"Hum. Wal, we're a-comin' to a house, but I don't think ye'd want it. It's—uh—kind o' lonesome. Folks says ther's some funny things into it. Thar 'tis now."

They emerged from a tunnel of trees, and Douglas looked at a house which he knew must be that of Jake Dalton. It was at the left of the road, in a clearing rank with grass, behind which rose forest headed by two giant pines. It was a little box of a place, not more than twenty feet square; weatherworn, with patched roof and tiny sagging porch. The small bare windows gaped black and blank at the forest cordon. The door stood ajar, as if the latest occupant had left in haste. About it hung an air of abandonment, of desolation, of forbidding loneliness.

"Looks all right to me," declared Douglas. "Not very cheerful, but I'll try it one night, anyway. Whoa!"

Eb drew the reins. The horse stopped. Douglas got out and lifted his pack. The old man sat soberly staring at the house.

"I dunno," he muttered. "I dunno. Stranger, ye better ride on a piece."

"Where to?"

"Um—I dunno. Mebbe somebody'd sleep ye. I'd do it myself, but I'm a-goin' to High Falls an' I ain't comin' back tonight."

"Thanks. I appreciate it just the same. But I reckon I'll stop here for the night. Much obliged to you, Mr. Wilham, for the ride, and more for helping me against those dogs."

"'Tain't nothin'," was the hasty disclaimer. "Them dawgs ought to been kilt long ago—I give Nat warnin' more'n once. An' don't call me mister. I ain't used to it. 'Most everybody calls me Uncle Eb."

"All right, Uncle Eb," smiled the other.

The bright old eyes dwelt on him, and an answering smile lifted the white mustache.

"Gorry, ye look funny with them eyes all bunged up," chuckled Eb. "Snake's got a hard fist, ain't he? I wisht I could been a peewee bird up into a tree an' seen that fight. It must of been good. Wal, son, if ye can lick Snake mebbe ye can handle whatever ye see round this house. I'll stop here an' visit with ye tomorrer, mebbe, when I come back. Shall I fetch ye some food from High Falls?"

"I wish you would. Lots of it. And some tobacco."

"Smokin' or chawin'?"

"Smoking. And for food get whatever comes handy. I'm not fussy."

He drew out a small wallet. Uncle Eb waved it aside.

"Pay me when ye git yer stuff, boy. I dunno yit what it'll cost. I'll git jest what I'd buy for myself. Then if—if ye ain't here tomorrer I can use it to home. G'by. G'yapalong!"

The hoofs hammered again into the sand. In a fresh cloud of dust the rickety wagon rolled away and was gone among the trees beyond.

Douglas shoved his wallet back into its pocket and stood a minute eying the little house glooming under the solemn pines. Then, reaching to his pack, he pulled from under its straps his coat. From that garment he drew two buck-shot shells. Coolly he reloaded his gun.

"I reckon I'll be here tomorrow when you come back, Uncle Eb," he muttered. "Now, Mister Ha'nt, let's get acquainted."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HA'NT

SUNSET stretched its long shadows again across the Traps.

Up on the heights, the light of day still was bright and clear. But down in the bluff-bulwarked valley of the Coxing Kill, a thousand feet lower than the Minnewaska table-land behind which the sun was rolling down in the southwest, the dusk was slowly shading into dark. Already the air vibrated with the swelling chorus of the katydids, scraping out their insistent warning of frost which had not yet come; and from every grassy space cheeped the lonesome dirge of the crickets. Night was drawing on.

Down on the diminutive stoop of a little house beside the Clove road, a man stirred and glanced around him with a frown. The steadily increasing *clack* of the big green bush-bugs and the growing chill of eventide had routed the thoughts which he had been drawing through the stem of a blackened but empty pipe—thoughts which, to judge from his absent gaze and the half-smile on his lips, were more pleasant than those now obtruding themselves. He shook his shoulders as if to dislodge the night chill settling there. Abruptly he stood up.

His swift survey swept the little fallow field at his right, where the black choristers of the grass were chirping away among the unseen roots; the narrow sand-track of road, empty of all but thickening shadows; the darkling mass of trees and brush at his left. Then he pivoted and peered into the darkness lying beyond a door which had been standing open at his back.

Nothing showed in the room beyond—nothing, that is, which should hold the fixed attention of a man; nothing alive. Vaguely, in the wan light still entering through the cracked panes of a curtainless side window, he could see a rickety table with one leg broken, a chair minus a back, a little rusty stove, and, in one corner, a jumble of small things recently dumped from his pack. Along a wall which started beside the open doorway showed the faint outlines of three more doors, all in a row. And that was all.

Nothing, surely, in such a scene need make this man listen keenly and half lift the shotgun in one fist. Yet he stood there for a long minute, searching the room repeatedly, then centering his gaze on the first of those three doors in the wall. That door stood open. And the queer chill between his shoulder-blades was not all due to the coolness following the sinking of the sun: It was that clammy feeling inherited by mankind through countless generations—the subconscious warning that a hidden menace lurks behind the back. And his ears subtly corroborated the caution of his nerves. Despite the clamor of the insects, he could have sworn that in the first room there at the right he had heard a slight rustle.

That room was the bedroom. It was a mere cubby-hole, not more than seven feet square, containing only a crude bed and a lamp-shelf, both fixed. The bedstead, which the new tenant had inspected and decided to use, apparently had been built in the room by the former owner; a contrivance of boards and hardwood posts, with interlaced ropes serving as a spring, and a noisy mattress of corn-husks. Head, foot, and one side were snug against three of the walls, leaving only a yard-wide space between bed and door. At the foot was the one tiny window of the room.

To enter that sleeping-closet, anything must go through the door or the window. The window now stood open, for Douglas had forced up its cobwebby frame after sweeping the floor as best he could with a stubby old broom found in the grass; but that opening was within ten feet of his left hand as he sat on the steps, and nothing could possibly have gone in there without his knowledge. Still less could anything have gone past him through the door. Yet he felt in his marrow that something was there.

With slow, careful shifting of his balance he stole across the meager stoop. Not a board creaked, not a sound did his descending soles make. With the same stealth he leaned against the door-jamb and inched his head inside. At length, braced by hands against the wall, he was leaning far in and peering through that right-hand door. In the dimness beyond stood no living thing.

Until his arm-muscles began to ache he hung there; and never a sound came to him from within. Yet his nerves continued to deliver their warning. In that room where Jake Dalton had slept was *something;* something besides the bed and the bare lamp-shelf; invisible, intangible, but—*something!*

He drew back and glanced around once more. The dusk was drawing around the little clearing a closer cordon of gloom; an eerie whisper came from the pines, swept by a gusty wind; the throb of insects resounded as before. Nothing moved. He felt for a match. When he had it, he stepped heavily into the house and tramped over to his gas-lamp, hanging on a nail; turned its valve; shook it up, and waited for the water and carbide to mingle and form the gas. In the brief interval of waiting he watched all around and rapidly reviewed his movements since opening that window.

He had explored the place, finding at the second door a stairway leading into a dusty loft littered with dead wasps; at the third, a room even smaller than the bedroom, partly filled with stove-wood. Outside he had found a well, in which the water seemed good, and a little shed holding only a broken barrel or two, burlap bags, an empty jug, and similar trash. Both door and window had been open while he made his inspection; but he had returned to the bedroom and tossed his blankets on the mattress, and nothing new was there then. And since that time he had not been more than ten feet from it.

The fumes of gas struck his nostrils. He lighted the match and touched it to the little nozzle. White and bright, the flame lighted up the place. He strode into the bedroom.

Absolutely nothing new was there. With a self-derisive grin, he stooped and glanced under the bed. The floor was bare.

"Now are you satisfied, you timid old woman?" he jeered. "What's the matter with you, anyhow? Getting nerves?"

His words hollowly mocked him from the outer room. With a disgusted snort he turned away. Boots thumping defiantly, he clattered back to the three-legged table, shoved its crippled side against the wall, kicked the backless chair up to it, and set the lamp on it. To the little pile in the corner he went, and from it he extracted the dry remainder of a bread-loaf and a paper-wrapped chunk of cheese. Then he returned and sat down, hitching around in the chair to get his back toward a windowless wall.

"All the same," he meditated, sawing off a slice of bread with his jackknife, "if I stay here long I'll have to make some improvements. For one thing, that bedroom is too darned handy. Window opens right on the road. So does the front door. No curtains on any of these windows, no key for that door. With Snake Sanders and Nat Oaks both thirsting for my gore and undoubtedly acquainted with the position of that bed—yes, I reckon I'd better move upstairs or something. No use in lying meekly down and inviting a fistful of shot to come in and mess me up. No sense in sitting here in the light now, either."

He turned off the gas-flow, set the lamp under the table, and fell to munching his meager provender.

"However, I'm safe enough in that room tonight," he told himself. "Nobody knows I'm here except Uncle Eb, who isn't coming back until tomorrow—and maybe little Miss Marion, who isn't likely to tell. There's nothing in that room but imagination, and imagination won't keep me very wide awake. Ho-hum! I'm going to sleep like a log this night."

He arose, dipped a cup of well-water from his canvas pail dangling from a nail in a low ceiling-beam, washed down his food, and reseated himself.

"Yes, sir," he informed the loneliness, carving another chunk of cheese, "this is my night to sleep. Last night I sprawled between two rocks, and the night before I lost a lot of repose watching those backwoods detectives prowl around and spy on me from the bushes down beside the creek. Things have been coming right fast in the last three days. Before that I'd never been inside that wall of cliffs over yonder. And now I've killed a catamount, assisted at the demise of three dogs, knocked one eminent citizen stiff and helped send another to sleep; made two able-bodied enemies and one potential friend—Uncle Eb—and given love's young dream a boost along the rocks to a new hide-out. Oh yes, and assisted an escaped conv——"

He bit off the last word, suddenly aware that he was talking aloud and recalling the ancient proverb to the effect that walls sometimes listen. Gloom now surrounded him, for the slow-dying gas flame had sunk to a little blue button on its nozzle. Rising again, he tiptoed to the door and spied around. No lurking form was near.

"Guess that will be about enough talking," he concluded.

He drew back and shut the door. Stepping across the room, he found the table, brought it over, and set it against the door so that the slightest push from outside would tip it over with a warning clatter. Then he went along the walls, tested the windows and a rear door—all of which were warped into immovability—and, carrying his gun and the chair, retired to the gloomy bedroom. There he placed gun and chair beside the bed, and on the chair he laid matches. After frowning thoughtfully at the open window he sighed and closed it.

Deliberately he undressed and rolled up in his blankets. For a minute or two he lay reveling in his freedom from clothing and the yielding embrace of the crackling but comfortable old mattress. Then the first grateful feeling of physical comfort passed. He lifted his head from the rolled-up coat forming his pillow, and turned his dilating eyes around. Over him was creeping a feeling of oppression, of inability to obtain air; and, worse yet, a panicky sensation that he was in a trap.

The blankets were snug and warm; yet that queer chill was crawling over him again. The air was fresh and clean; yet he opened his mouth as if stifled. Around him lay silence and blackness, intensified rather than relieved by the deadened chorus of insects outside and the lighter shade of the window. He turned suddenly on a side. At the loud rustle of the husks under him he jumped half erect.

A moment he poised; then he flung himself angrily back.

"You idiot!" he muttered. "You miss the stars overhead and the little night breezes around; that's all. You're in a house, and you'll have to get used to it. Go to sleep, you fool!"

He shut his eyes and forced himself to breathe regularly. But through his brain streaked the thought:

"You're in a dead man's bed! You don't know what killed him! You——"

"Oh, shut up!" he growled aloud, bouncing over on the other side. "What's that to me? I'm going to sleep!"

For a few minutes he stubbornly held his position. But he was lying now with his back to the open door into the main room, and the creepy feeling at his shoulder-blades became intolerable. He turned again. But this time he made the movement deliberately, and at the repeated crackle of the mattress he grinned. After blinking at the dark a minute he relaxed, warm once more at the back, his eyes closing naturally.

Rapidly his fatigue asserted itself. With the muffled lullaby of the crickets swinging rhythmically on, he lost himself.

Hours passed. He slept peacefully, changing his position a little at intervals, unconscious of his movements or of anything else. Then, all at once, he found himself up on an elbow, staring wide-eyed into the dark.

SOMETHING had moved. It seemed that the bed itself was quivering slightly. Yet there was no sound near him—no new sound anywhere——

What was that? There was a sound now—but not in the room. It was up overhead—up in the empty attic; a sound of muffled footfalls, deliberately crossing the floor; a sound like that of bare heels going quietly across the boards. It traveled to and fro, as if an undressed man were wandering aimlessly. Then it began to come down-stairs.

A bump, and it stopped. Another bump; another pause. Then two soft bumps telling of a couple more stairs descended. It was the sound of a man stealing quietly down; halting to listen for any noise below; a man not deft enough to put his weight on his toes and avoid the bump of heels. Yet the stairs did not creak as they would under the weight of a man.

Very quietly, Douglas moved over and found a match. With the same stealth he opened the gas-valve of his lamp. While he waited for the acetylene flow he heard the heels reach the lowest step. He listened for the stealthy turning of the knob and the creak of door-hinges. They did not come.

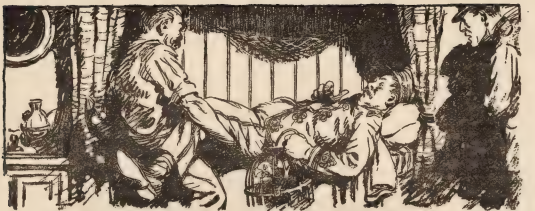
Cracking the match on his thumb-nail, he lighted the gas and shot its ray outward. Nothing met his gaze—nothing but the table against the outer door. Softly he lowered his feet, gripped his gun, and arose. Reason told him no man could be in that attic; but his ears positively asserted that a man had come down those stairs.

On his toes he drifted outward. In the main room he saw no living thing. Quietly he set the lamp on the floor, its beam glaring at the stair door. With a swift grab he turned the knob and tore the door open.

Then, gun leveled, he stood and gaped.

The stairway was utterly empty.

TO BE CONTINUED



A WIFE *in* EVERY PORT

by WILLIAM P·BARRON

THE coastwise steamer, *Maggie May*, from Galveston, Texas, made her lazy way up the river and finally tied up at one of the fruit-wharves at Tampico, Mexico.

There was the usual crowd of fruit-wharf idlers found on any fruit-wharf anywhere, to welcome the *Maggie May*. As he gazed at the nondescript collection of Mexican peons and Bahama negroes the mate of the *Maggie May* felt the uselessness of wasting choice American profanity on them. So he contented himself by saying, "Git to —— away from here" for the benefit of the negroes, and a choice description in his best Texas Spanish of the ancestry, both recent and remote, male and female, of the Mexicans in the crowd.

The skipper was nowhere to be seen. As this was the *Maggie May's* first trip to Mexican waters he should have been on deck. The mate was wondering if his superior, by a lucky chance, had fallen overboard, leaving him in command, when the captain appeared.

The sight of the captain caused the mate, a man of rugged constitution, to gasp for air and stagger slightly as with bulging eyes he stared open-mouthed. The cabin-boy, standing somewhat to one side behind the skipper, having purposely followed him on deck to observe the effect of the captain's appearance on the mate, snickered openly.

"Well, what are you staring at, Mr. Shannon, if I may ask?" said the captain bruskly "It's a —— of a note when a man can't change clothes on his own boat without the mate having a stroke of paralysis. And as for you, my lad," said the captain, turning savagely on the grinning cabin-boy, and giving him a box on the ear, "you go below and try some soap and water on that freckled face and neck o' yourn. And don't you show yourself above deck neither till you change clothes and look half-way decent.

"Not that I blame you much at that," he said in a louder tone to the disappearing boy, but also for the benefit of the mate and the assembled crew, "seeing what an example you have set before you by some of the officers of this here boat."

Thoroughly enjoying the impression he had made, Captain Dougherty turned again to the mate and explained why he had thus arrayed himself in the full-dress uniform of a Texas Naval Militia officer.

"Mr. Shannon, sir," he said with the dignity that goes with the full-dress uniform of a captain of the fleet, "I am going ashore, sir. And bein' as this is the first time we have touched at this here port, I deemed it best to make as good an impression as possible. So I put on this here uniform which I am entitled to wear if we ever have another war and the Texas Naval Militia is called out for active sea-duty.

"With this here uniform on I am goin' to call on the American consul, who is a sort of cousin of mine, and get him to go with me

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"A Wife in Every Port," copyright, 1922, by William P. Barron.

to call on them fruit-plantation owners and Mexican custom-house officers. You know how all these here foreigners fall for uniforms. So I figger this here uniform will help us get this cargo of fruit about twenty per cent. cheaper. And," he concluded lamely, as he saw by the mate's face that his idea was disapproved, "next trip you can go along too, to visit them Mexican swells."

"Better take me now, sir," urged the mate, who knew the captain's real objective to be a dance-hall and dark-eyed, graceful, slow-moving *señoritas,* rather than consuls and custom-house officers. "I can talk this lingo and could help you wonderful if you should want to talk any."

"No, Mr. Shannon, no sir! Not tonight," said Captain Dougherty firmly. "Some other time. And as fer talkin' the lingo," he added resentfully, "I'll bet I can make these here Mexicans understand as good as any mate of a coastwise steamer can."

So walking loftily by the incensed mate, who was trying to think of a suitable reply, the captain made his way up the gang-plank to the wharf. Here he showed his fluent command of the Spanish language by shouting to a cabman:

"Here you! Come and git me!"

And as the command was accompanied by a beckoning wave of the hand, the skipper's request was readily understood and he was soon on his way to the American quarter of Tampico.

As he left the wharf he stuck his head out of the cab and yelled at the mate—

"Keep all hands on board tonight, so as to be ready to begin loadin' cargo at daybreak in the mornin'. And—" seeing the red head of the cabin-boy above the coil of rope near the companionway—"if that carrot-headed young —— behind yer there so much as sets a foot on this here wharf, skin him alive!"

"Oh! Yes, darn you!" muttered the mate glaring at the disappearing cab. "Shout your derned orders to me, who ain't no more to you than them —— peons on the wharf! And then go off all by yourself to bull around and fight booze all night, leavin' me behind to do the work.

"Yes! I have to stay on board this here rusty water-broke tin Lizzie whilst you are sportin' erround with them good-lookin' *señoritas*. Never mind, Old Buck! Some day you may wish you hadn't!"

And with this oration delivered apparently to the wheel-house, the mate went below for his supper.

In the early hours of the morning the captain returned and was assisted below to his cabin by the Mexican night watchman of the wharf, and two of his own crew who had been sleeping on deck and were awakened by the captain falling over them.

The mate was awakened by the disturbance and going in the skipper's cabin found him being deposited in his bunk, full-dress uniform and all. Firmly clutched in his right hand was a bird-cage and in the cage a pea-green parrot. This parrot was giving vent to a stream of Spanish profanity, which would have caused an old pirate of the Spanish Main to retire in defeated confusion.

"Where did you get this here—this here feathered cuss-word phonygraph?" asked the mate, breathing hard from excitement and curiosity.

But only a confused murmur of "beautiful lady," "parrot birds," "cab" and "cops" came from the captain's bunk, then a few more unintelligible murmurs, to be followed by a loud snore.

Swearing softly to himself, the mate gave the grinning night watchman half a dollar for his trouble and gruffly bade the two members of his crew to beat it to the deck. He took the parrot's cage from the captain's now nerveless hand, deposited it on the floor and covered it with the captain's raincoat. He then systematically, but in vain, searched the captain's slumbering person for unconsumed spirits and retired to his own cabin.

The mate had hardly composed himself for slumber when a commotion on deck caused him to sit up in his bunk and listen. There was the sound of a struggle, a piercing feminine shriek, and then a voluble outpouring of soft, rapidly spoken Spanish. The mate jumped to his feet, wrapped his raincoat about him and went on deck. If the mate himself had been drinking he might have doubted what he saw when he got on deck. But an unsatisfied yearning for strong drink, which a thorough search of the captain's person had failed to relieve, told him that he was perfectly and entirely sober. Therefore he was forced to believe the vision before him to be real.

In the dim light of the night watchman's lantern, assisted somewhat by the moon, the mate beheld a wild-eyed, somewhat disheveled good-looking young Mexican woman, dressed in regulation Mexican costume—lace mantilla, black-lace dress, everything as if she had stepped out of a movie screen.

"What's goin' on here, George?" he asked one of the A. B.'s who was helping hold the young woman.

"Blessed if I know, sir!" replied George. "All I know is, I was sleepin' here on deck as peaceful as a lamb when the skipper woke me up by fallin' over me an' nearly bustin' me open. And when we got him stowed away safe me an' Bill here come back on deck ag'in to try an' git a little more sleep, afore time ter go to work loadin' the boat. Just as we lay down this here lady, why she rises up from behind the companionway over there and runs over here jabbering something or 'nother. And then she tries to kiss me an' Bill both." The mate sniffed skeptically. "An' then when she sees who we is she lets out a screech like a fog siren an' tries to bolt down into the cabin, an' we catches her an' the watchman here he comes on board an' the two of 'em jabber together awhile. Then he grins an' waves his hands about and scrooches up his shoulders like a Frenchie, an' that's all we know."

"Yes, that's all we know," put in Bill, "an' we would like to git a little sleep. With the old man fallin' over us an' gals prowlin' 'round all hours, where do we git any rest?"

Here was an opportunity for the mate to use the Spanish he had modestly mentioned to the captain early in the evening, and he utilized it.

Coming nearer to the struggling young woman, and bowing as gracefully as a rheumatic back and his rain slicker would permit, he asked the lady's pleasure in the best Spanish at his command.

"Oh, Adorable sir!" gushed the *señorita*, rolling her big black eyes and clasping her hands. "Surely the good Saint Guadalupe has sent you to aid me in my distress! I seek only my husband. My husband, a fine, fat soldier of the sea, who but an hour agone came on this so beautiful ship-of-war. Do you not know him? No? He is so handsome and stout, so noble and brave! So beautiful he looks clad in the rich uniform of the navy of his country, for it is an admiral he is, of the bravest and best! In his hand he carries 'Poriuto Chito,' my parrot, my dear bird, my little son that I love. He has promised to take me, me and Poriuto Chito far far away across the wide ocean to a new land! Oh, take me to him, I beg, I pray, I implore! For I fear that the heat of the night may have made ill my dear husband, who is fat, for but this evening he staggered as one overcome by heat or wine!"

"Good Lord! Lady!" gasped the mate. "Wait! Give a feller a chanst! I kin talk your talk some, but I ain't no express train! And this ain't no warship neither. It's just a plain little old dinky fruit-steamer. And there ain't no lord high admiral on board neither; just me an' the crew, an' the skipper. The skipper is fat, that's right, an' tonight he did have on a naval militia cap'en's uniform, but just now he is so full of booze he couldn't talk to his own mother. That bird of yourn is down in the cabin, an' how the cap'n got him I don't know."

"Lord, Bill!" said George, "did yer ever know afore that the mate could talk this lingo? Wonder if he can cuss in it?" he added curiously.

"Never mind, men," said the mate sternly, "I can do a lot of things you fellows don't know about. One of 'em is to knock a man's block off when he tries to git fresh with me. What we must do now is get this here woman away from here afore daylight, which ain't far off. She talks and acts like she is drunk her own self. Lord knows what sort of a jam the old man has got into about her. She is on the hunt for him now, says she is his wife. You boys hold her till I go get a cab."

After half an hour, during which the lady who was firmly held by George and Bill, wept and talked Spanish by turns, the mate returned with a cab.

The woman was bundled into the cab by Bill and George. The mate gave the driver five dollars in American money, which caused him almost to drop off his seat. He was ordered to drive swiftly without stopping to the main plaza of Tampico, there deposit his fair passenger, and make haste to be gone. The lady departed, shrieking in despairing tones for her husband and her parrot, her dear bird, her little son. In his haste the harried mate had forgotten to go below for the bird and now it was too late; the cab had gone.

Accompanied by George and Bill upon whom he had sternly commanded secrecy, and which they faithfully kept as long as he was present, the mate went to the cook's galley for a strong cup of coffee and an early breakfast.

IN AN hour the little steamer was astir, being rapidly loaded with bananas, oranges and lemons for the Galveston market. The captain, however, did not stir until near noon. Urged to consciousness by a consuming thirst and muffled shrieks from the half-smothered parrot, he slowly opened his eyes. He put his hand to his throbbing head and tried to get some sensation in his dry mouth by moving a parched, bitter-tasting tongue back and forth.

"*Chingoue!*" yelled the parrot, hampered in his vocal efforts by the heavy sea-coat which covered his cage. "*Chingoue! Cavaroon! Diabilio de nomveo sievestie!*"

"What?" said the captain sitting up and looking about him bewildered. "What the——"

"Did you call me, sir?" asked Dick, the cabin-boy, thrusting in a fiery head. Consumed by curiosity he had not stirred from the outside of the captain's door since he had eaten his breakfast.

"No, I didn't!" snapped the captain. "And if I had you wouldn't have been in hail. Get back up on deck and send the mate down here."

"Now, Mr. Shannon," said the captain grimly when the mate had reported and the cabin-boy chased away from the door out of earshot, "what's the meanin' of all this here?"

"This here what?" exclaimed the mate with virtuous indignation. "Everything is goin' smooth, the ship's already half-loaded and by night the hatches will all be down and us ready to sail with the tide if the pilot shows up. I'm sure I ain't——"

"Oh! stow all that," said his superior irritably. "You know what I mean. You ain't so thick as all that. What I want to know is how did I get here and—and where did I get that—that there bird over there," indicating the parrot who, released from the gloom of the enveloping sea-coat, was ruffling up his feathers, snapping his bill and swearing softly to himself.

"What do you think I am?" snorted the mate, anger burning in his breast against the captain.

He had expected a repentant sinner full of confidences as to his experiences of the night before. But here was a fault-finding saint who was apparently trying to fix the responsibility of the evening's escapade on him.

"What do you think I am?" he repeated, "one of these here blamed fortune-tellers who tells you where the pirates buried their money for a dollar?

"How do I know where you got that there bird? All I know is, he is the cussedest thing I ever listened to, man or bird. That's all I know, except," he added as an after-thought, "I know too, what a good-lookin' young Mexican woman came on board soon after you was brought back and put to bed. And she claimed you and that there bird both. She said you was her own darlin' husband and——"

"Whut?" said the captain gasping for breath. "Whut?"

"Them was her very words," the mate continued unctiously. "Her very words! 'My own darlin' husband,' she says, 'a handsome, fat, er—er stout, brave high admiral of this here warship,' she says, callin' the *Maggie May* a warship."

"You don't mean it!" stuttered the captain. "Why, Jim——"

"It was Mr. Shannon you called me awhile ago," interrupted the mate in a musing tone.

"Why, Jim," continued the captain familiarly, putting his hand in a friendly way on the mate's knee and pretending not to notice the interruption.

"Why, Jim, it's the dyin' truth I don't know—why—well, just as I got out of the cab on the wharf and started up the plank to come on board, I seen her standin' in the shadow of the custom house and—well, I don't deny I had a few drinks, an'——"

The mate coughed discreetly in his hand.

"I said," repeated the captain glowering at him, "that I had had a few drinks. I don't deny it and I didn't pay no attention to her.

"But she come runnin' towards me holding out that there parrot in a cage and jabberin' that —— dago talk. And—and I took that cage outen her hand 'cause she handed it to me. Then she—well, she throwed her arms about my neck and—and kissed me plumb smack on the mouth afore I could help myself or keep her off——"

The mate coughed again. The skipper glared at him.

"Better take somethin' fer that there cough, Jim, afore it gets the upper hand."

"I will, sir," said the mate discreetly.

"Well, as I was sayin', she kissed me afore I could prevent it, and then she went runnin' back in the shadow of the custom house like she was goin' after somethin' or somebody. And, well, then I come on board and must have fell asleep here with my clothes on while readin' the paper," concluded the captain dignifiedly. "What did you do with the woman?"

"I sent her off in a cab," replied the mate shortly.

He had hoped for a full and contrite confession, thought he was entitled to it, had justly earned it on account of the trouble he had experienced getting rid of the captain's fair companion; therefore, he was indignant at the captain's attitude of dignified reserve.

"And that ain't all," he added; "you owe me five dollars for the cab."

"All right. Now you get back and see to that fruit loadin' and don't let 'em put no sorry stuff off on you. I'll be up on deck after I shave and have breakfast. We must slip out with the tide tonight. Send that dern boy down here."

That night, just as the *Maggie May* had cast off and was moving slowly and sluggishly down-stream an old-fashioned carryall or spring hack, drawn by four little Mexican mules, and full of gaily uniformed *rurales*, drove up on the wharf.

Seeing the steamer was getting under way the *rurales* leaped from the hack, ran to the wharf gesticulating wildly and shouting out a volley of voluble Spanish.

The captain and the mate were standing on the bridge and the mate, pricking up his ears, got the main drift of the *rurales'* talk.

"Shall I order the pilot to put back, sir?" he asked hurriedly. "Them policemen say——"

"Never mind what them policemen say!" snapped the captain, who was still suffering from an alcoholic headache. "I can understand 'em easy enough. What they want is more duty on this here cargo. I know 'em. The consul put me wise to 'em. Well, let 'em come and get it, if they think they can overhaul the *Maggie May*."

"But, sir," insisted the mate, "they say——"

"Don't tell me again what they say!" roared the nervous and infuriated captain. "Ain't I tellin' you I know what they say, leastways what they want. You go below and see how them engines is workin' and tell that triflin' boy to make up my bunk. I want to go to bed as soon as I can. I don't feel just right," he finished lamely.

The *Maggie May* was gaining headway and the wharf was rapidly receding. The mate had only a few minutes to make up a mind that was already in a state of strong unrest.

"All right, sir," he hesitated, "but don't blame me if them *rurales* get you in trouble."

"Will you shut up!" yelled the captain. "I don't never blame a man who ain't just right in his head. It's ag'in' the law!"

And the mate with a dejected air and humble mein, but with a knowing grin on his face went below.

The sun was up and the *Maggie May* with her nose turned north was well out in the swell of the open sea before the captain, tired and ready for his bunk, was able to go below. The fresh gulf breeze had cleared his head and he was in a somewhat better humor as he turned toward the companionway. He had just reached out his hand for the rail when Dick, the cabin-boy, seemingly propelled by some force from below, shot out of the companionway and stumbled and fell at the captain's feet. He got hastily to his feet and was preparing to dart away in the direction of the galley, when the captain caught him by the collar.

"Here, you limb of Satan, what's up?"

"Nothin'," stuttered the boy. "Nothin' wrong with me; you ask the mate."

"Ask the mate what?" said the captain shaking him.

"Ask the mate who's down there asleep in your bunk, 'cause I ain't goin' to tell you."

And availing himself of the captain's surprize he wriggled out of his grasp and was gone, gone to the galley to spread the news.

The captain looked about him. To his surprize there was no mate in sight, although the mate was to take the next watch. The captain walked back, ascended to the wheel-house and whistled down the speaking-tube, which connected with the officers' cabin. There was no response. Indignantly he descended from the wheel-house and again assayed the companionway. He met the mate coming up. The latter had the serene cast of countenance seen on the face of cats after they have devoured the family canary.

"Fine time to come on watch, half an

hour late," sputtered the incensed skipper. "What did that —— boy mean about some one being asleep in my bunk? He said, 'Ask the mate.' "

"Well, you may ask the mate, sir," answered that worthy in a sepulchral voice. "I have just this minute found that there Mexican gal sound asleep in your bunk, with that cussin' parrot out of his cage an roostin' beside her."

"What!" stuttered the captain. "What! That there woman down there!"

" 'Tain't no other person but her," the mate rejoined with a fateful finality. "Go see for yourself. And while you are about it perhaps you will tell me what you will do with her when we make Galveston, and how you will explain about this one to your Texas wife."

"Texas wife!" gasped the captain hoarsely, clutching the stair rail in a grip he would have gladly used to throttle the mate. "Do you mean to stand there and say this here woman is my wife too? Texas wife! I ain't got no other wife but the one in Texas and sometimes I wish I didn't have her."

"That's what I always thought," said the mate gloomily, "until now. But this here woman talks mighty straight talk."

"Straight talk, my eye!" retorted the captain bitterly. "How do I know it's straight talk? I've just got your word for it. I can't understand a blamed word she says. How could I marry a woman I couldn't talk to? Tell me that!"

"Ho! So you can't understand her!" the mate said sarcastically. "Why the other night when I offered to go 'long for you you said you understood them Mexicans as well as any mate on a coastwise steamer could understand 'em. And you said too that you know'd what them *rurale* policemen wanted.

"Now this here mate," he continued, warming to his work as he saw how dumfounded the captain was, "this here mate who ain't good enough to go and eat dinner with you and your cousin, the U. S. Consul, why he understands this here young woman's talk very well. And she says she is your lawfully wedded wife. I understand that all right, and so will the Mexican consul at Galveston when she tells her tale to him. And what do I know what you done, or what sort of scrape you got into that night whilst you was drinkin' and mixin' up all them fancy Mexican drinks? You don't know your own self. 'Course 'tain't none of my funeral," said the mate virtuously, "only your wife is a cousin of my wife's and I hate for the family to be mixed up in a bigamy trial."

With this raking broadside well delivered, and taking deadly effect, the mate passed on and made his way to the wheel-house.

Safely within its sacred precincts and seeing the captain in a brown study, standing just where he had left him, the mate stuck his head out the door, and for the benefit of Bill and Joe, who were washing down the deck, he called to the captain in a loud aside:

"Say, you had better go below and see if your wife is awake yet. She——"

"My wife!" shouted the exasperated captain, casting aside all caution in his anger. "—— you! Come down here on the deck and say that."

"I ain't sayin' nothin' for myself, sir," said the mate humbly. "That is what *she* says. 'I am the great sea-captain's lawfully wedded wife,' she says."

Bill and Joe, with a poorly suppressed snicker, dropped the deck hose and hurried forward as if they had neglected an important duty. The mate slammed to the door of the wheel-house, leaving the skipper flinging his arms about, fighting for air.

The captain, in the heat of his altercation with his first officer, had not observed what the A. B.s and the mate had seen.

Suddenly from behind a soft pair of arms went about his neck and a voice said in liquid Spanish—"*Dulce Corazon*—Sweetheart—why dost thou hide thyself from thy little wife?"

And he was given a resounding smack that caused the man at the wheel to stagger and throw the *Maggie May* off her course three points. The captain gasped for breath and gurgled deeply in his throat as he struggled to release himself from the arms that were affectionately choking him. He won free at last, and holding the young woman firmly at arm's length, he looked wildly about him.

George and Bill were leaning over the port side of the ship, evidently absorbed in the play of a school of porpoises. The mate was gazing with rapt attention at the starboard horizon, as if searching for a sail. The man at the wheel was staring ahead with the wholly engrossed concentrated look of an amateur driver, piloting his new car up

Fifth Avenue for the first time on a busy afternoon.

There was no movement made to come to his assistance. For all practical purposes, the four men in the range of his vision might just as well have been stone images.

For a moment, as his anger rose, the captain feared that adequate language would fail him in his time of need. Then, suddenly remembering that the struggling woman he was holding did not understand English, he was enabled, after taking in the requisite amount of air, to express his views of the past, present and future of the four men in the sound of his voice. To this he added his unbiased opinion of their ultimate destination in the Hereafter, that would have turned Dante green with envy.

"And," he continued in a voice that bellowed with righteous wrath, "if I had a mate on this here boat that was good for something besides shark bait, he would come for'ards and help me with this here lady. Help hold her or tell me what she is talkin' about or somethin'. He's been braggin' for two days how he can talk Mexican, and now the first time he is wanted, he is lookin' out acrost the sea like Moses lookin' for the Promised Land.

"Just wait till I get this here woman down below in the cabin and I'll make every durned one of you laugh on the other side of his face. The Lord help me, I will!"

The mate, thus adjudged, threatened and challenged, hastily moved his gaze from the sea and came down out of the wheel-house.

"What can I do, sir?" he inquired anxiously.

"Tell me what this here lady is sayin' for one thing, and then help me get her below."

"She is still sayin' she is your lawfully wedded wife," said the mate firmly, "but them *rurales* said——"

"Never mind what them *rurales* said," snapped the captain. "If she is still talkin' that foolishness about bein' my wife you needn't tell me nothin' else now. Just help me get her below where them two grinning fools can't see or hear and then we'll talk."

"But them *rurales*—" began the mate again.

"Will you cut out that *rurale* talk!" yelled the captain. "Let them *rurales* be! Help me get this here woman down below!"

The mate with the set face of a man who had led a forlorn hope and failed, took hold of one arm, the captain the other, and after a short struggle, a few tears and a sob or two, they piloted the young woman below, shoved her into the captain's cabin, shut and bolted the door and stood panting outside.

After recovering their breath they went into the mate's stateroom. The captain sat heavily down on the mate's sea-chest, the mate sat on his bunk and the two stared at each other.

The skipper broke the silence.

"Don't set there starin' at me like a fool. What am I to do with this here young woman when we get to Galveston? Tell me that! And she claimin', or you say she is claimin', to be my wife. What am I to do with her? Me already with a wife and two gals almost old enough to marry."

"How do I know what you are goin' to do?" the mate replied belligerently. "I ain't no fortune-teller. I know what I'd do if I was in your fix."

"What?"

"Commit suicide," replied the mate promptly. "Take the morning watch and go over the side easy-like in the dark. If you didn't drown at once a shark would get you anyway. Or else you could speak a ship, board her an' go to some foreign port an' stay till this all blows over. Your name would be safe with me."

"Thanks fer them kind words of advice," the captain answered bitterly. "Have you anything else you would like to say?"

"Nothing except them *rurales* said——"

"There you go ag'in!" retorted the captain, wrathfully leaping to his feet. "Can't you never talk five minutes without bringin' in them durn little yaller roosters that look more like painted wooden soldiers than honest-to-goodness cops? It was them that got me in this fix."

"How?" asked the mate, changing his indifferent lounging attitude for one of alert erectness. "I thought all along you hadn't told me all there was to tell."

The captain flushed guiltily. "Well, you see, her comin' on board so unexpected an' sudden-like, kinder upset me. I—I forgot to tell you just how it was."

"Never mind that," said the mate shortly, "tell me now."

"Well, jest as I was gittin' in that cab to come back to the wharf, after that there dinner with the consul, this here young woman come runnin' down the street with that parrot-cage in her hand, an' that parrot screechin' an' cussin' in Spanish. An' you see the street there at the consulate has lots of trees an' it makes everything dark, an' so help me, afore I knowd what was goin' on that young woman, parrot-cage and all had me about the neck, and she was screechin' and jabberin' and carryin' on worse than the parrot.

"I asked the cabbie what she was sayin' as I didn't know enough Spanish to talk to her and——"

"Now you see!" exclaimed the mate triumphantly. "If you had took me along in the first place none of this here would have happened. I could have understood her and then you would have knowd just what them *rurales*——"

The mate stopped abruptly. He had caught the captain's eye, which although still alcoholically bloodshot, was menacing and malignant.

"Mr. Shannon," he said with great dignity, "are you or am I tellin' this? And as for them *rurales*, if you ever mention 'em again, I'll fire you if it's the last act."

"Yes, sir. Go on, sir," said the mate hurriedly.

"Well, as I was tryin' to say when you butted in, the cabbie told me this here woman was in some sort of trouble with the police. And—and—well, seein' that she was good lookin', that is, had a good face I mean, and had kind of took to me." The mate nodded. "And then too I had had a drink or two, and was feelin' good."

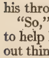
"Drunk, you mean," the mate muttered.

"What did you say, Mr. Shannon?" inquired the captain anxiously.

"I said yes, sir," said the mate, clearing his throat.

"So," continued the captain, "I decided to help her out of trouble if I could. Without thinkin' I put her in the cab and told the cabbie to drive to the wharf as fast as he could. And—well, you know the rest. It was that uniform that I owe it to," added the captain gloomily as an afterthought. "Women always fall for uniforms and I cut a swell figger in them gold-braid togs."

"I'll say you did!" agreed the mate fervently. "And now what's to be done about it?"



THEY were interrupted by the cabin-boy who reported the lookout had sighted a steamer flying distress signals. Both officers went hastily on deck and changed the *Maggie May's* course so as to overhaul the distressed boat, which they did in a short time.

The crippled steamer proved to be a sister boat of the fruit company's fleet, bound for New Orleans with a cargo of bananas from Porto Cortez. One of her engines had broken down and repair parts were furnished by the *Maggie May*.

It required the combined efforts of the captain and the mate to prevent the captain of the crippled fruiter from boarding the *Maggie May* for a friendly game of cards during the three hours the two ships would be neighbors, while the repairs were being made.

The officers of the *Maggie May* dreaded what was below locked in the captain's stateroom and the lame, unsatisfactory explanations that would have to be given. It might reach the ears of the fruit company's management in New Orleans and both men lose their berths. So, to frustrate the proposed visit, which they saw could not be avoided much longer without arousing suspicion, Captain Dougherty had a boat lowered hastily and set out for the crippled steamer. It was his intention to remain on board until the repairs were completed and the other boat under weigh, avoiding a return visit.

It was late in the afternoon when he returned. As soon as he was on deck he hastily beckoned the mate aside and, clearing his throat, said—

"Mr. Shannon, I have been thinking."

"What?" saked the mate evasively. He could tell by the captain's manner that something important was afoot, and he didn't want to compromise himself.

"Do you think you could manage to take the *Maggie May* in without me? You will pick up the pilot some time tomorrow, and it looks like fair weather."

"Don't see why I couldn't," said the mate shortly. "I always do anyway. That is, you usually allow me to take her in," he corrected himself hastily as he saw the belligerent look in the captain's eye.

"If you think you can take her in I'm goin' on to New Orleans on the *Juanita* so as to avoid trouble with that there woman down below. My wife might get wind of it, and it would just about ruin me.

"Now you can talk her landgwidge and I am goin' to leave it all to you to manage, and manage right. You can pacify her and turn her over to the Mexican consul and tell him she was a stowaway on board."

"But them *rurales'* said—" began the mate, forgetting what the captain had threatened.

"There you go! Draggin' in them yaller monkeys ag'in'!" the captain gritted. "Am I never to hear the last of 'em? Good thing you didn't say no more 'cause I would have fired you flat, woman or no woman, and took the boat in myself."

"I am sorry, sir," said the mate hastily. "I forgot."

"All right then," said the captain in a mollified tone, for he was at the mate's mercy and knew it. "You take the old tub in. Then go to my home and tell my wife I was called to New Orleans from Tampico, by telegraph. Mind you, make no mention of any of this here meetin' up with the *Juanita*. Say I went from Tampico on her.

"Here's twenty dollars for expenses. Do the best you can, and you sha'n't lose nothin' by it. You stick to me, and I'll stick to you."

"Yes, sir."

"All right. I'll get my bag and go back to the *Juanita*. Me and her captain is old friends. We was first and second mate together, and everything will be all right with him. You get under weigh for Galveston. Telegraph me at the St. Charles Hotel as soon as you get everything shipshape and that there woman off your hands. I won't go near the owners until I hear from you, so they won't know but what I run over to New Orleans by train. I am going to have a long talk with the owners, and if you manage this thing all right you sha'n't lose none by what I say to 'em."

"Yes, sir. Thank you," said the mate with a guilty look on his face.

Fifteen minutes later the mate was leaning over the side watching the captain get in the boat bound for the *Juanita*. He leaned farther over. "Sir," he called. "Can I say one word about—well, you know what you said I mustn't talk about?"

"Not about them," replied the captain firmly, looking up with a face flushed from his exertions. "Not one —— word about them! And don't you dare try it!"

"All right then!" said the mate in a relieved tone. "Don't you blame me none."

"Not a blame!" bawled the captain as he bobbed over the waves. "Not if you get safe to port and do as I said."

Three days later the captain sat at breakfast in the St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans, reading the following night-letter:

ALL SAFE NO TROUBLE. I KNEW THERE WOULD NOT BE. THEM RURALES SAID THE NIGHT WATCHMAN TOLD THEM THERE WAS A CRAZY WOMAN ON BOARD THAT HAD BEAT IT FROM A NUT HOUSE. THEY SAID WOULD CABLE THE MEXICAN CONSUL AT GALVESTON TO TAKE CHARGE OF HER WHEN WE GOT THERE AND PAY ALL EXPENSES. YOU NEVER WOULD LET ME TELL YOU WHAT THEY SAID.

GAVE PARROT TO YOUR WIFE. TOLD HER YOU SENT HIM. TOLD HER ALL HE COULD SAY WAS THE LORD'S PRAYER IN SPANISH.—JIM.

THE SEE-SAW *of* FATE

by GEORGE E. HOLT

"Those who are exalted shall fall, and those who are low shall be raised high."—Moorish Proverb.

THE hand of Allah had reached down to the filthy prison of Mogador, and thence had hauled forth Mohamed Ali, to make him basha of Tangier.

Now, in Morocco—as a contrast to America, where, behind grim gray walls, a man may carry on a shipping combine or a propaganda, play the markets, or even run for Congress—there was in those days a very great difference between being a prisoner and being a basha, or governor. Those days were not so long ago—but long enough that Mohamed Ali, who is now fat and indolent and living a life of political virtue—mostly—was then in the full strength of years and activity. Wherefore he bore his imprisonment with little of the resignation demanded by Allah. And in a year of repression one can form quite a variety of what, in these days, are called "complexes," and what used to be known as either plans or deviltry, depending——

Mohamed Ali did not object to anything but the fact that he was temporarily *hors de combat.* He resented strongly that his imprisonment prevented him from attending to certain matters which interested him, but he was broad-minded enough to know that, as he would assuredly make trouble for those in power if he were at liberty, it was true wisdom on their part to withhold that freedom. For Mohamed Ali was a politician as well as a philosopher—which was the reason he found himself in prison. Politics are played differently in Morocco—perhaps better than in the Occident. Imagine, if you will, that upon becoming president, Mr. Harding, or Mr. Wilson, had immediately ordered the arrest and imprisonment of all the congressmen and senators and other chiefs of the defeated party. How much that would have simplified matters!

Mohamed Ali, being a politician, and a petty chief, had backed the wrong horse, in the person of a certain vizier. That vizier had fallen from the Sultan's grace and, temporarily at least, from the grace of Allah, with the result that he and his followers had been placed under that usual restraint which effectually prevented them from gumming up the wheels of the Administration's progress. This system requires that jail facilities be extensive, if not well-conducted. When I visited Mohamed Ali, after he became basha, he had the prison of his own town full, and had just sent ninety-odd other "guests of the Administration" on to a neighboring basha, to hold for him, his neighbor having more guest-room.

And so Mohamed Ali for almost a year squatted on his dirty matting, chasing fleas and other things, and letting his repressions form complexes. Psychoanalysts tell us that the dynamic action of a repressed desire increases in ratio of the square of its distance from the time of inception, or something like that. Mohamed Ali was himself analogous to a complex, and for

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a year his dynamic potentialities had been increasing in ratio to the square of the distance from the day of his imprisonment. Which, as you shall see, in these stories of his affairs, made him a rather forceful character. A big, brown, laughing man——

Then, as I have said, the hand of Allah reached down and opened the door of the prison. As it did the same service for the vizier, restoring him to favor, Mohamed Ali rode almost directly from the filthy jail to the perfumed mansion of the basha in the *casbah* of Tangier. And for many days thereafter, he was very busy refilling the jails that the hand of Allah had emptied.

"Those who are exalted shall fall, and those who are low shall be raised high."

Wherefore when one is down it behooves one to await in patience the operation of the see-saw of fate, and, when one is up, to take every possible precaution to postpone the fall. So those who are up hold the board of success tightly with both hands—and watch, with apprehensive eyes, the inevitable rising of the opposite rider.

Mohamed Ali, having become basha, riding forth in state, addressed by titles of dignity and honor and fear, lord of a city and province, and custodian of the lives and affairs of its people, enjoyed the ascent, but realized the certainty of the opposing motion. In due time it came.

Now, I would not need to tell you all these things, were it not for the fact that they constituted "complexes" which, for some years thereafter, made the name of Mohamed Ali loved and cursed, depending—And even brought it to the lips of the American, Greatheart, on one flaming occasion.

A big man, Mohamed Ali. Big and strong and bold. Afraid neither of *Shaitan*, nor Sultan, nor Christian infidel—nor even of Allah. Him he honored, and also his Prophet—who, incidentally, was an ancestor of Mohamed Ali—and knew with a sure faith that so long as he did not offend Allah, Allah would not offend him. Independent, bold, fathered by a bold and independent Berber tribe. From his mother even a greater boldness—her people dealt with Allah as man to man. Of some of them it is told that, Allah having destroyed the cattle by drought, they mounted and armed and went forth in search of him, that they might slay him, as he had proven himself an enemy instead of a friend. A bold people—and a very personal god. And consequently Mohamed Ali dealt with Allah as he would deal with a friend, without familiarity, but with intimate trust—and demanded like treatment in return.

A big man—his white skin tanned, as to face and neck and hands, by the Moroccan suns and winds. Mild brown eyes, when he is content—stormy whirlwinds of passion otherwise. Brown beard trimmed to a point, which runs up the sides of his face and creeps under the white turban and red fez. A gentleness reserved for the gentle—strength reserved for the strong. Filled with contrasts. As when returning from a ride during which his hands had choked the life out of an enemy, those same untrembling hands gathered a great bunch of white narcissus and thrust them in his belt.

And this is the manner of his downfall—the story of those things which led to his outlawing, to the price set upon his head, to the long and unsuccessful pursuit of him—and to the bold exploits of himself and his friends and enemies. Exploits during which Mohamed Ali, outlaw, laughed greatly, and dared bravely, and relied upon the friendship of Allah for protection.

It came about inevitably in the scheme of things, that the Sultan's favor toward Mohamed Ali's friend and patron, the elderly gentle—and weak—vizier, Achmed Baghdadi, again should wane. Consistency in friendship is essentially not one of the attributes of the powerful, and the Moorish Sultan was young and easily led by those who were to be benefited—Moor and European alike—by the weakening of his friendships and the spread of disloyalty in his empire. As a result of this sultanic weakness, those who today had power, tomorrow had only resentment. And eventually it became the turn of Baghdadi, the vizier.

Now, in Morocco, when one realized that one's favor was at an end—or very near the end—if that one were wise, he without delay betook himself and his harem and his worldly goods and his followers, to a place of refuge—his own fortress in the mountains, or, lacking one, to the fortress of some friend. And, also, one informed one's allies as quickly as may be, of the impending danger.

The vizier, being wise, withdrew quickly from the capital with his people and his goods; and being a friend to Mohamed Ali, at once dispatched a *rakkas* with a message which informed the basha of the manner in which birds fly before an approaching storm. Mohamed Ali was no naturalist, but the message interested him. And during the night of the same day that he received it, he, too, collected his valuables and friends, and with his harem—the women and children of his family—took the road toward Anghera and safety.

But although both the vizier and Mohamed Ali had acted speedily, as became the need, those who had moved the Sultan to the disgrace of the vizier and his friends, saw to it also that no time was lost. Wherefore Mohamed Ali, with the dawn of the new day, saw a substantial force of the Sultan's cavalry moving toward him from the Fez-Tangier road. Manifestly they had been speeding toward Tangier, to capture him there; now they turned and the chase was on.

All of which did not worry Mohamed Ali at all. He could travel as rapidly as they—and high noon would see him on ground where with a hundred men he could hold off a thousand. He gave an order which slightly increased the pace, and grinned cheerfully at Fate.

NOON drew near, and also the entrance to those stony defiles among the hills which pictured safety. And then, from the nearest of those defiles, spurred a horseman on a lathered mount. He dashed up to Mohamed Ali, drew his horse to his haunches, and held out a written message. Mohamed Ali read it and his brow crinkled. The message was short. The vizier wrote that he was pursued by a heavy body of horse, cut off from his refuge by another, and would probably be surrounded by mid-afternoon. Could Mohamed Ali aid him!

"And where is he?" asked Mohamed Ali of the *rakkas*.

"He comes this way, in the hope of nearing you, or of reaching the hills. Ride swiftly southward and you will meet him in two hours."

Now was Mohamed Ali frankly perturbed. It is the fashion for men to think that they do not consider the evil course before deciding upon the meritorious one, but that is usually a lie—one of those lies we are always telling ourselves in order that continued existence may be possible. For he who can see only a righteous course in all things must indeed be blind in one of his soul's two eyes, one of which sees evil and the other good. Seeing both, it remains for the soul to choose that which it will accept.

Mohamed Ali had perfect vision of his soul's eyes—no myopia blinded him to the fact that the wise thing, the safe thing, the thing he greatly desired, was to continue the course he had been pursuing. The vizier, if he escaped, would not hold it a defection against him; if he failed to escape—there would be plenty of time to create an explanation.

And on the other hand—

"Bah," growled Mohamed Ali to himself. "I begin to think like a Christian! The road of friendship is the road of Allah. The vizier is my friend." And, to the waiting *rakkas*, "I ride south."

He gave an order, which resulted in the continued forward march into the safety of the defiles, of a handful of his men, with his family and treasure. Then, with forty horsemen pounding behind him, he rode south, in a wide curve which took him away from the oncoming cavalry of the Sultan, leaving them in pursuit five miles behind.

The vizier needed aid—more aid than his friend could give him. When Mohamed Ali topped a purple hill, he saw, in a little valley, the vizier's forces circled by their enemies. Mohamed Ali reflected a moment. Then at the head of a spear formed of his horsemen, he charged down-hill and cut through the circle as though it had been a field of barley. Once through, he turned and led his men out again—and again back in. But the holes closed quickly—they were outnumbered two to one. Quickly it fell to hand-to-hand fighting. And then the cavalry that had been pursuing him came up. Mohamed Ali saw them coming, and sped toward the vizier. He realized acutely that the arrival of the additional forces left no possible chance of victory. More—that it was now a question as to whether escape was possible either for himself or the vizier. He was faced for a fraction of a second by the question of his own safety. Perhaps, by the aid of Allah, he could cut his own way through the hedge of enemies and gain his way to freedom. But he knew the vizier for an aged, gentle man, unused to such a struggle as now enveloped him—knew that were he to seek his own freedom his friend's head assuredly would hang above the Fez gate upon the following day. Wherefore he quickly put from him the thought of his own head.

When he reached the side of the vizier he saw that his friend was indeed in sore straits. His little strength had been sapped by pursuit and excitement. His head was bowed in resignation, and his white beard rested tired upon his throat. Mohamed Ali looked with pity, and his heart went out to the man who had shown himself to be his friend. His mind worked swiftly—he must find a way out for the vizier.

His eye suddenly registered the fact that the vizier wore a light blue *sulham*, the sheer white garment usually worn apparently having been torn from him or discarded. This blue cloak caused Mohamed Ali to remember an incident in English history—and he resolved to duplicate it. He dismounted, drew the vizier down from his horse and quickly changed *sulhams* with him. Then he pointed to a tiny white saint's shrine sitting at the foot of the hills less than a mile away, and spoke briefly but pointedly.

A moment later, Mohamed Ali was back upon his horse, the hood of the blue *sulham* dropped down to shield his face. Seeking a point in the circle where his own men were thickest, he quickly rode through and set off at a gallop toward the hills, heading in a direction which led him away from the shrine. As he had known would happen, there at once went up a cry that the vizier was escaping, and pursuit was immediately taken up. Certain ones had recognized him for Mohamed Ali, but their shouts were drowned in the tumult, and they were swept aside by those who saw the blue *sulham* speeding away.

Now Mohamed Ali's horse was the best in the *Gharb*, and he had to hold it in to keep it from getting too far ahead of his pursuers. For a little while. But finally he saw a horseman wearing a common brown *djellaba*, and followed by only a handful of the enemy, nearing the shrine. At which he gave a loose rein and a cheerful word to his horse, which proceeded to put a great distance between Mohamed Ali and those who came after him. As he drew up at the foot of the hills among which lay safety, he saw that the vizier had gained the sanctuary and, for the time being, was safe—safer than anywhere else in the world perhaps.

All of this was well and good, so far as it went. But it did not go very far, Mohamed Ali reflected, as he watched from a hilltop the disintegration of the battle—watched his own men, and those of the vizier, escaping as best they could. For some the world's battle was over, and they slept in queer postures, as they did when little children, but Mohamed Ali knew that most of his men would rendezvous that night in the safety of the Anghera hills. Although that was satisfactory, other things were not. For a few days the vizier was safe. The shrine was a part of the sacred shadow cast by the mantle of the Prophet's protection, and those who sought its safety were in the care of Allah himself. For a while. But for a while only. Mohamed Ali knew quite well that his trick was known, that the pursuers of the vizier would now settle down to a siege—would go into camp about the shrine—and that some day, when the food or water that the old marabout, custodian of the shrine, might have was exhausted, the vizier must come forth into the hands of his enemies. But it gave a breathing spell.

"Every delay has its advantages," observed Mohamed Ali cheerfully to his horse. "And, moreover, between darkness and dawn Allah can bring an end to many troubles. Let us therefore give some thought to the matter and, with Allah's aid, the road may be made clear."

And he rode on.

The picture that Mohamed Ali had visioned—the camp of cavalry about the little white shrine, with round, conical brown tents pitched among the argan-trees, like so many *pinoche* cones or beehives, the horses tethered anywhere and everywhere, the smoke of camp-fires, the scores of red-coated, yellow baggy-breeched soldiers idling about, and the innumerable noises that went with it all, quickly became a reality. Kaid Andus, who was in command, did not intend returning to sultanic displeasure if it could be avoided. The vizier was in sanctuary. Very well—he was under Allah's protection. But Allah would not send him food, and eventually the demands of the vizier's belly would be more powerful than the demands of his spirit. Then——

In the morning of the second day after the battle, there came to the ears of the *kaid* in his tent raised voices and the nasal wails of some one calling upon the name of Allah. Going forth, he found a group of his men surrounding a figure swathed in rags, with dirty matted beard, almost concealed by a cloth around the shoulders, one eye covered by a filthy bandage, and close-cropped head encircled by a soiled, tattered turban. Obviously a beggar, who, catching sight of the *kaid*, elbowed his way through the group of soldiers.

"Here!" he cried. "At last comes the great *kaid*, with whom I can speak and gain justice. Since when, O *kaid*, has access to the holy shrine of Mulai Idress, the great and glorious, been denied the weary sinner coming on pilgrimage? Ai, these be evil days for those who would render praise to Allah and his Prophet. What is this scum who stand between me and entrance to the holy place?"

"Peace! Peace! In the name of Allah," cried Kaid Andus. "Your tongue needs a bit, that it may be ridden. Now what is it about?"

The shoulders of the ragged stranger sank a little, and an additional whine crept into his voice.

"I am only a pilgrim to the shrine, Exalted One, Head of the Sultan's armies, Protector of the Crown. I have nothing to do with soldiers and armies and war. I am a Fassi. I make pilgrimage to this shrine each year, to spend an hour or two cleansing myself of sin."

"Better a river, to cleanse you of dirt," observed the *kaid*, shrinking back from a filthy paw which approached him in supplication.

"And these men—they would prevent me from entering the shrine. Until you came, O most Glorious Captain, whose victories— But let me enter and I shall send such prayers to Allah in your behalf that you shall conquer all the earth—unless, perchance, you have already done so."

An aide, who had been of those holding the beggar, snickered, and the *kaid* cut at him with his riding-whip. The snicker made history.

"Enter then," permitted the *kaid*, with a look at his aide. "But pray not for me, but for the soul of the vizier, Baghdadi, whom you will find within, no doubt also pestering Allah about his own affairs. Give him my respects." He grinned.

"The great *kaid* shall no doubt some day become our Sultan, Commander of the Faithful," whined the holy man as he moved quickly toward the shrine; and, under his breath, "unless Allah in the mean time shall amuse himself by making asses' ears grow upon his head."

The door of the shrine opened at his summons, and he was swallowed up by the shadows within.

Perhaps two hours elapsed before the door again opened, to give egress to the ragged figure, blinking his one good eye in the glare of the outer day. For a moment he stood, till the sight grew better, then, noting Kaid Andus about to mount his horse, approached him and, humbling himself, begged to say that the vizier expressed the hope that in the near future he would be able to pay his respects in person to the great *kaid*. The *kaid* cursed the respects of the vizier, and observed that very swiftly the vizier would find himself without a head with which to voice respects.

"Perhaps—as Allah wills," said the beggar. "Who is the vizier to oppose such as you? And—I must be on my way. My bones are old, and each year the pilgrimage becomes harder. *Selaama*, *Sidi*—and may you soon be smiled upon by His Majesty."

"Be off—be off—" growled the *kaid*, and watched the beggar shuffle off in a little cloud of yellow dust raised by his sandals.

THE sun reached meridian and beat unbearably upon the parched earth. The horses were brought into the shade of the argan-trees—and the argan-trees were near to the shrine. The soldiers ate; digestion and heat made them sleepy.

The door of the shrine opened slowly, an inch at a time. Eyes looked out, observing a saddle horse—the *kaid's* own beast—picketed at one corner of the shrine. The door closed again. But a moment later it flew wide open, a big bearded figure in a flowing white *sulham* strode forth and ran toward the picketed horse. It was not the sort of figure one would expect to see issuing from a shrine—in each hand was a heavy automatic revolver, and over the shoulder hung a Winchester.

In the distance a soldier shrieked with surprize and fired his gun into the air. The beehive suddenly hummed. The *kaid* tumbled from his tent, rubbing his eyes with one hand and carrying a gun in the other. Now more shouts—

"Mohamed Ali! Mohamed Ali!" And again, "Mohamed Ali!"

The *kaid* looked. At the corner of the

mosque, in the *kaid's* own saddle, on the *kaid's* own horse, a white-robed figure sat, and grinned with all of his brown-bearded face. The *kaid* raised his gun, and Mohamed Ali charged, his automatic spreading lead and fear. The *kaid* had faced a wounded wild boar—a tusker—in his charge, and had not flinched—but before the charge of Mohamed Ali his hand shook and his shots went wild.

Then Mohamed Ali reached him—reached him and seized him by the arm, and with a mighty heave flung him across the saddle, his gun describing a curve above the horse's head. Now, of course, were the *kaid's* soldiers afraid to shoot, lest they hit their chief, and Mohamed Ali, like Satan loosed, thundered about the camp jeering and gibing. One soldier, more daring than is usual in a mercenary—or more careless—leaped at Mohamed Ali with a knife, but Mohamed Ali's foot caught him under the jaw and dissuaded him from further efforts.

"Allah!" reflected Mohamed Ali. "And they send such as these to capture *me*. But it would have been different for the vizier; although once, I remember, he might have done as I have done."

Then he rode away from the camp a little distance, and unceremoniously dumped the *kaid* from the saddle. That chieftan regained his feet expecting nothing less than a speedy execution at the hands of his captor, and tried to steel himself for the ordeal. But instead:

"O great and glorious leader!" mocked Mohamed Ali. "May the vizier greet you? O Resplendent One— O Protector of the Sultan—may the beggar salute you? Ho! Ho! Ho!" His great laugh echoed among the tents. "Ho! Ho! Ho! You set the vizier free, and now I go, also—Sword of the Sultan. Give my respects, an you will, to His Majesty when you report to him—if you have a head left to do it with."

There was no answer. Mohamed Ali spat in the dust, laughed again, and—outlaw now—rode off into the hills.

THE OLD-TIMER

by R. M. Patterson, Jr.

HERE I am, an old 'un, a-sittin' on a string-piece,
A-smokin'and a-thinkin' of the days gone by;
Watchin' the steamers a-comin' in or goin' out,
Foulin' the river, and a-blurrin' of the sky—
Lord! What a change has come about, thinks I,

Since I was a young chap—as trim a proper sailorman
As ever rove a block or laid a hand upon a clew—
Comin' in from Callao up this very river,
But cleaner then, and clearer, and the sky more blue,
In the old *Althea* clipper, battered, weary, overdue.

Mary, when I come ashore, told how she watched her standin' in,
Roundin' to at anchorage—her spars ag'in' the west,
"Like a fowl from a long flight come back home ag'in—"
Says Mary—"folds her wings and snuggles down upon her nest—"
Drop our hook and furl our canvas—"fold our wings and go to rest."

Mary, she's gone; and the old *Althea*
Is doin' shameful duty as a sand-barge tow.
And me, the proper sailorman, well, I'm wharf watchman,
A-sittin' here and starin' at the water's ebb and flow—
A-dreamin' of that Summer evening forty years ago.

HOW SITTING BULL WAS KILLED

by E. A. Brininstool

WHEN Sitting Bull, chief medicine-man of the Sioux nation, was killed at his log cabin on Grand River, South Dakota, December 15, 1890, while resisting arrest, by the Indian Police of Standing Rock Reservation, the greatest mischief-maker and general disturber of all the Sioux tribe was sent to the happy hunting grounds.

The Ghost Dance craze had struck the reservations, working eastward from Nevada. Sitting Bull became immediately one of the chief followers of the new religion, and as his "medicine" had always been looked upon with great favor by his people it is not strange that he soon had quite a following.

The Secretary of the Interior became greatly displeased when told of the activity of Sitting Bull in pushing the "Messiah" craze. The wily old medicine-man was talked to very frankly by Agent McLaughlin of the Standing Rock Reservation, but all to no purpose, although "Old Sit" professed his friendship for the whites with his usually oily tongue.

The day soon arrived when it became necessary to cause the arrest of the disturber. Col. Drum, commanding officer at Fort Yates, was ordered to "secure the person of Sitting Bull," and it was decided that the arrest should be made by the Indian Police, with the military within ready call should their help be needed.

It was also decided to make the arrest on December 20th, a "ration day," when most of the tribe would be in for their supplies. Sitting Bull had steadily refused to accept rations from the Government. Therefore it was expected he would be found alone at his camp on Grand River.

However, on December 14th it was discovered that Sitting Bull was getting ready to "skip out" from the reservation and join the main body of renegade Sioux in the Bad Lands, where they had congregated. It was therefore decided to make the arrest on the following morning, and forty-three of the Indian Police, under Lieut. Bull Head and Lieut. Shave Head, rode into Sitting Bull's camp at dawn no the morning of the 15th for that purpose.

The old medicine-man was yet asleep when the police arrived, but he was quickly aroused and told that he was under arrest and must accompany the police. He readily agreed to go with them, and while dressing gave orders to have his favorite horse saddled and brought to the door, which was done. He then stepped outside his cabin, closely followed by a cordon of the police with drawn revolvers.

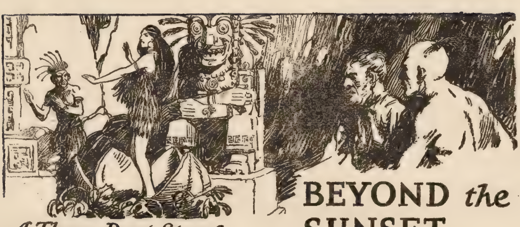
Here his son, Crow Foot, a youth of seventeen, seeing that his father intended to make no resistance, taunted him with cowardice. By this time about a hundred and fifty of Sitting Bull's followers had congregated about the cabin, and the old medicine-man, stung to the quick at the sarcastic remarks of his son, screamed out an order to attack the police.

Immediately two shots were fired by Sitting Bull's adherents, and in an instant the battle was on. Lieut. Bull Head, although himself mortally wounded, immediately wheeled and shot the medicine-man through the body, while Second Sergt. Red Tomahawk shot him in the right cheek, killing him instantly. Sitting Bull's medicine had failed him at last.

A bloody fight followed between the Indian Police and their red brethren before the white troops arrived. Eight of the hostiles were killed and five wounded, while five or six of the police were killed.

This was the forerunner of the real war which followed on December 29th, known as the Battle of Wounded Knee—probably the last Indian war to be fought in the United States—in which nearly one hundred and fifty of the Sioux, men, women and children, were slain, while the loss to the troops was some thirty killed and as many more wounded.

The body of Sitting Bull was buried a few hundred yards south of the military cemetery at Standing Rock Reservation, and thus passed the greatest disturber of the Sioux nation—an Indian who steadily refused to travel the white man's road and become reconciled to his mode of life.



BEYOND *the* SUNSET

A Three-Part Story
Conclusion

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "The Doom Trail," "A Son of Strife," etc.

NOTHING had I found in the months since the death of my wife to draw me from the despair into which I had sunk. Thus it was that when Master Burnet, Governor of New York Province, proposed a trip for me into the Western territory, I needed no great amount of urging. Tawannears, the Seneca Indian who sought the spirit of his dead Gahano in the Land of the Lost Souls, was to accompany me. It was his belief that I could find the soul of Marjory there; but Master Burnet wished me to ascertain to what extent the French and Spanish had colonized along the Mississippi. Peter Corlaer was the third member of the party.

Adventures we had in quick succession; but the first that seemed about to turn us back was a meeting with a French inspecting party under Charles Le Moyne. Black Robe, the Jesuit who distrusted all Englishmen, undertook to detain us, but with Le Moyne's assistance we managed an escape. On we went to the Mississippi, where suddenly we met Black Robe again, who joined us in our crossing.

From here we went West—meeting Indians, now friendly, now hostile—and I had my first sight of the mighty herds of buffalo that cover the plains beyond the Mississippi. Westward we went for months, until the Sky Mountains were reached—and after many heart-breaking attempts we finally discovered a pass, and found ourselves beyond the range, and in the camp of the Tsutpeli Indians.

They pointed out to us the Mountain of the Great Spirit, and toward that we turned our faces.

The ascent was fraught with more danger than we had yet met; and, reaching the summit, we looked down upon a lake of steam which I alone recognized as a volcano. There Tawannears made his plea to the Great Spirit and cited his bitter need.

Down through the mists we went, risking life at every step, until we reached our camp.

A strange booming noise attracted our attention and led us to what we decided was the Pacific Ocean. We had gone as far as we could; our exploration westward was ended; and we were willing to turn our faces to the east once again.

But ill-luck befell us, for a meeting with a grizzly bear resulted in a broken ankle for me and near-death for Corlaer.

After a long Winter spent nursing Corlaer back to health, we struck southeast through a beautiful valley that led us into a desert, and here we suffered cruelly. Coming upon a large lake of salt water, we skirted its southern shore and entered a strange country of brilliantly colored rocks.

Here we were set upon and harried by a group of squat bowmen, who followed us for days. Fleeing from them, we rounded a cliff and came upon a strange sight—a maiden tending a herd of wild turkeys, her arrow leveled at us in alarm, challenging our approach.

I had barely time to explain in Spanish—which she spoke brokenly—that we were friends, when the bowmen attacked us. Summoned by her shrill whistle, her people, cultivating the fields beyond, hurried to our aid, and we beat off the invaders.

Kachina, for such was the shepherdess' name, told us we were in Homolobi, the land of the cliff-dwellers. Wiki, the priest and political leader, an Indian of considerable intelligence, took us to the village, where we were held virtually as prisoners till our fate should be decided. The village was divided into two political factions, the one led by Wiki and Kachina, who were inclined to be lenient with us; the other led by Kokyan, chief of the snake priests, who was both jealous of Wiki's prestige and covetous of Kachina. Our situation was further complicated by the strange attraction of Kachina for Tawannears, who thought he saw in her a resemblance to his lost Gahano.

We could not escape, for the squat bowmen, or Awataba, ringed the valley in on all sides; so we were forced to wait till the festival of the new moon when they should decide our fate—and strange and terrible and unexpected it was.

The time of ceremony arrived all too soon. The people gathered before the great temple and the activities began. First there was a procession of priests and chants and rites of which we could understand little. The priests bore poisonous snakes which writhed about their heads, and, as the procession passed us, what we feared suddenly took place.

"Beyond the Sunset," copyright, 1922, by Arthur D. Howden Smith.

CHAPTER XVIII

TAWANNEARS' SEARCH IS ENDED

THE drumming became hurried, confused, and the priests jostled together, as if surprized. There was a *plop!* on the sandy ground, and a rattlesnake as long as Peter contorted into its fighting coils within arm's-reach of Tawannears. But the Seneca remained perfectly quiet, not moving a muscle of face or body. A gasp went up from the people around us. Women cried out, and children whimpered. Wiki rose from his stool with a single curt order, and one of the priests stepped out of the line and retrieved the snake, calming it by a stroking motion down its belly as he grasped it just under the venomous head.

It all happened so quickly that few saw the incident, but Peter's big hand gripped my arm until I thought he would tear it off.

"If he mofed he was deadt!" he gasped in my ear. "*Ja*, if he mofed, Tawannears was deadt!"

"Did he drop it?" I whispered fiercely to Tawannears. "Did you see the priest drop it?"

"Yes, brother," he answered coolly, "but who could swear he was responsible?"

"And you stayed quiet!" I marveled. "How could you know the snake would not strike?"

"It was nothing," he returned. "That snake never strikes unless it thinks you are frightened of it. The man bungled. He should have dropped it on Tawannears. Then it would have struck instinctively. But Hawenneyu did not will it so. Tawannears' medicine is too strong for the snake-priest, Kokyan."

THE last of the snake priests disappeared through the temple entrance, and old Angwusi left her stool and advanced in front of Massi's image, prostrated her bulky figure with much difficulty and then made invocation to the sun, riding high toward mid-afternoon. Her words had the form of a prayer, but at intervals responses were intoned by the masked clan dancers behind her, and at the end all the people shouted an answer, turning their faces up to the sky.

She returned to her seat amidst a rapt silence that was broken only when Wiki made a signal with his *paho*, or prayer-stick, a painted and befeathered baton, which was the symbol of his office. As he raised it the drums in the temple rumbled again, and the masked dancers began to sing, swaying their bodies to the haunting rhythm of the music. After each stanza Wiki would chant an invocation of his own, prostrating himself on the sand before Massi. And this song terminated, as had Angwusi's prayer, in a chorus of all the people, the thudding of the drums running in and out of the roar of voices that echoed against the overhanging cliff.

The singing died away. Silence once more. Wiki, standing now beside the image of the Ruler of the Dead, lifted his *paho* in a second gesture of command. *Tap-tap-tap!* very slow, went the drums. The masked clan dancers sorted themselves into two files facing inward on either side of the temple doorway. The people around us, whose interest in the ceremonies had been perfunctory since the snake dance, hunched forward in attitudes of pleasurable expectancy. A murmur of voices bandied back and forth the one word—

"Kachina!"

I saw the muscles twitching on Tawannears' jaw. His face that was usually so masklike was openly expressive. But a look of puzzled inquiry in his eyes changed to bewilderment, when, instead of the Sacred Dancer, appeared the snake priests, marshaled by Kokyan and staggering under the weight of a hurdle upon which reposed a mighty pumpkin. It was twice as thick as Peter in girth and half as tall from the litter of stalks and vine-leaves upon which it was set.

The drums throbbed slowly, and to the cadence of their beat the masked dancers struck up a new song, a wailing, minor melody, beseeching, imploring of Massi the continued toleration of their wants. The snake priests and their burden passed between the two lines from the temple doorway to the image of the Ruler of the Dead, halted a moment facing it, turned, and then, with Wiki and Angwusi preceding Kokyan, and the column of masked dancers folfollowing the hurdle-bearers, solemnly paraded the circuit of the plaza; whilst all the people sitting or crouching on the ground bent their heads and muttered, "Kachina!" or "The Sacred Dancer comes!" or else addressed impromptu personal prayers to Massi, Yoki, Chua and other lesser divinities.

Tawannears' excitement had grown to an extraordinary degree. The breath whistled in his nostrils. His chest rose and fell as if he were running. His features were drawn and haggard. His eyes never swerved from the enormous pumpkin.

"How could they have nourished it to such a size?" I whispered.

He did not hear me, but Peter, on my other side, made shrill reply—

"Idt is not real."

"Not real?"

"*Ja*, you vatch."

I peered at it the more closely, myself. Certes, it had all the outward seeming of a pumpkin magnified a score of times. There were the corrugations of the surface, the mottled yellow color with a hint of pale green, the blunt-ended stalk. But whilst I watched, the snake priests completed the plaza's circuit, gently deposited the hurdle in front of Massi, and took their position behind the idol in a single rank, with Kokyan a step in advance, arms folded on their breasts. The masked dancers formed a ring around the image, the giant pumpkin and the group of priests; and Wiki and Angwusi, on either side of the hurdle, commenced the next phase of the elaborate ritual.

Wiki seemed to be delivering an oration to the god. He included by his gestures the people in the plaza, the village, the priests, the valley below the cliff, and finally the pumpkin. Afterward we learned that he had been summing up the tribe's case for divine assistance, speaking from the viewpoint of the men. Angwusi, who followed him, described for the benefit of the deity the efforts put forward by the women and the especial reasons they thought they had for meriting aid. And to cap it, both of them united in an address drawing to Massi's notice the magnificent pumpkin which they would sacrifice to him.

This brought from the ring of dancers a prolonged shout of applause, the drums in the temple pulsed into a jerky, varying beat, and the masked figures pranced crazily around the idol and the pumpkin, the priests singing another of their weird, hesitating songs. Faster and faster thumped the drums. Swifter and swifter whirled the dancers. Wilder and wilder waxed the song. The end came in a crescendo of noise, color and movement. It snapped off almost with a physical jar. Priests and dancers flung themselves upon their faces in the sand. The drums were stilled. The quiet was so intense that all about me I could hear people's breathing, the gusty pants of Tawannears as loud as musketry by contrast.

For a dozen breaths this quiet reigned. Then Wiki rose, bowed low to that monstrous idol and stepped to the vast yellow pumpkin, sitting serenely upon its hurdle. He extended his *paho* before Massi's unseeing eyes, recited briefly a prayer—and rapped the pumpkin once. A sigh of anticipation burst from the audience. The pumpkin fell apart, dividing cleanly in quarters, and from its hollow shell stepped Kachina, a lithe bronze statue came to life, clad from breast to thighs in a sheath of turkey-feathers that puffed out under her arms in a mockery of wings. Her blue-black hair floated free beneath the confining band of serpent's-skin around her brow.

For an instant she poised in the fallen shell of the pumpkin, arms spread as though for flight. Then she leaped—almost, it seemed, she flew—from the hurdle to the sand, swooped this way and that, always with the gliding, wavy motion of a bird on the wing, hovered before Wiki, before Angwusi, sank in a pretty pose of piety before Massi's warped face, and so sped into the measures of a dance that was all grace and fire and vivid emotion, a dance no Indian could have done, and which charmed her beholders by its very exotic spell, its fierce bursts of passion, demonstrative, seductive.

Kokyan made no secret of its effect upon him. The gloomy face of the young priest was lighted by the unholy fires that burned within him. He came from his place at the head of the snake priests and stood with Wiki and Angwusi by the wooden idol, his eyes drinking in the sinuous loveliness of the dancer, her slender, naked feet scarcely touching the sand as she leaped and postured from mood to mood, her own eyes flaring through the tossing net of her hair, her lips pouting, smiling, luring, challenging, repulsing.

But I had little chance to observe her influence upon the Priest of Yoki. Beside me Tawannears was risen to his knees, and in his face was the look of the damned man who sees heaven's gates opening for him, doubting, trusting, unbelieving, paralyzed by joy, scorched by fear. He started to clamber to his feet, and the people in back of us volleyed low protests. I seized his arm.

"Sit," I adjured him. "What ails you, man?"

I think he did not even hear me.

"Use your wits," I exclaimed irritably. "You will have us all slain. You can see the maid anon."

'Twas Peter gave me the key to his state.

"He t'inks she is Gahano," he muttered. "*Ja*, dot's idt."

I exerted all my strength, and dragged the Seneca back to his haunches.

"Will you ruin us, brother?" I rasped. "This is sacred in the eyes of these people. We are——"

For the first time he seemed to comprehend what I was trying to do.

"Otetiani does not know," he said mildly. "She is my Lost Soul."

"A mist has clouded Tawannears' eyes," I answered, realizing that in this humor I must abide by the imagery of his people.

"No, brother," he returned, still without feeling. "You have not seen. You have forgotten. But Tawannears knew—before this happened there was a song in his heart that told him this would be."

"Of what?" I begged, conscious of the hostile looks that were acknowledging this interruption of the scene. "What said this song? Was it of one maid who looked like another?"

"She does not look like another," he said with dignity. "She is another. She is my Lost Soul."

"You are mad, brother," I groaned.

He smiled pityingly at me.

"No, my eyes are opened. But Otetiani can not see. What said the ancient tale of my people? That the warrior who traveled beyond the sunset would find the land of Lost Souls——"

"Is this land beyond the sunset?" I inquired sarcastically.

"It must be!" His voice rang with conviction. "Did we not see the sun set behind the Sky Mountains? And we crossed the Sky Mountains—and this land must be still beyond the Sky Mountains."

"Aye, but, Tawannears, you know that this is but a tale——"

"Yes, a tale of my people," he agreed steadily. "If one warrior did it, why could not Tawannears? So I believed always. Now I know it to be so. I have done it. Here we sit in the valley of Lost Souls. There is Ataentsic, brother."

He pointed to fat old Angwusi, who was eyeing us as balefully as Kokyan and the snake-priests, at last oblivious to the untiring grace with which Kachina still danced before Massi's wooden grimace.

"And there is Jouskeha her grandson." He singled out Wiki. "As the tale told, when the warrior came to the valley his Lost Soul was dancing with other souls before those two, and Jouskeha, in pity for him, took his Lost Soul and placed her in a pumpkin, and he carried the pumpkin back to his own country.

"See, it is all here. There is the pumpkin. There are the Lost Souls, who also danced. Ataentsic, I think, is loath to give up my Lost Soul, but Jouskeha's face is only sad. It is all as the tale said it would be. All that remains, brother, is to replace the Lost Soul in the pumpkin, and carry her back to my village."

Argument with him was impossible. He believed implicitly in this chain of inexplicable coincidences. He, who was in so many ways as cultured as an English gentleman, was the complete savage in this matter, resting his confidence in the vague mythology of his people, accepting for truth a familiar likeness and a sequence of parallel incidents.

I turned to Peter with a gesture of despair.

"What can we do?" I asked.

"Nothing," replied the Dutchman phlegmatically.

WHILST my back was toward him for this fleeting exchange of words, the Seneca wrenched loose from my grasp and strode out into the center of the plaza toward the group of priests and masked dancers surrounding Kachina's whirling form. The ceremony was suspended, stopped, as if the atrocious image of Massi had issued a direct vocal fiat. A growl of resentment came from the watchers on our side of the plaza. The faces of the snake priests were murderous. The leaping hate of the masked dancers was reflected in pose and denunciations. Angwusi frowned; Kokyan grinned with diabolical satisfaction. Kachina showed surprize and a certain distaste. Wiki alone concealed his feelings.

For us there was left no other course save audacity. We were committed. The conduct of Tawannears was such as to stir the anger of any barbarous people. Excuses were impossible. Our one chance was to carry it off boldly. And that meant we must make the first attack. 'Twas for us to take and keep the offensive.

"Come," I said to Peter.

He reared himself erect and lumbered beside me.

"*Ja,*" he squeaked through his nose," we hafe a —— of a time."

I caught up with Tawannears, and resumed my grip on his arm.

"Keep quiet. 'Tis for me to do the talking."

He made no answer, offered no opposition. I do not believe he had had any plan in rising when he did. He simply obeyed the urge in his heart to possess himself at once of this girl, whom he supposed to be the incarnation of his lost love, which had torn him free of all restraints, impelled him forward calmly to claim what he considered nobody would dare to deny him. But he had no means of speaking intelligibly to any one within the priests' circle, unless it was to Kachina, herself. And whether he had thought of this or not, he obeyed me now as docilely as a child.

"Do as I do," I muttered to my comrades, as we passed the circle of the masked dancers.

And opposite Massi's image I paused and offered a low bow. Tawannears and Peter imitated me faithfully; and that served to stall off the first wave of indignation. The priests were nonplused. We had accepted their deity, rendered him adequate honor. I drove home the advantage whilst I held it.

"We are strangers in your midst," I said to Wiki, speaking in Spanish. "It may be we have offended against your customs, but let our excuse be that my red brother thinks he has just seen a mighty piece of magic performed."

This whetted their appetites and equally placated their wrath. Wiki was naturally pleased with the idea of having an outsider testify to the closeness of his relations with his deity. He and Kachina, who had danced to his side, translated rapidly the gist of what I had said. Kokyan and his serpent priests scowled blackly. Old Angwusi looked interested. The others were baffled. But whatever they secretly felt they were induced to lay aside their hostility long enough to listen to my story, and that was everything, because it provided the opportunity for driving in tighter than ever the political wedges which disrupted the priesthood.

The effect of my narrative upon Kachina was comic. She swelled with pride, repeating with gusto Tawannears' claim that he had known her in a previous existence, and thus arrogating to herself an undeniably superior position. Wiki was equally strengthened by the tale, as bearing out his original announcement of Kachina's divine origin, but perplexed by the possible contingencies in Tawannears' appearance.

Angwusi was fatly disdainful of the whole affair. It helped her in nowise, except that she was identified with a goddess of a strange tribe. And against this she arrayed the probable enhancement of Kachina's position, and the certainty of increased prestige for Wiki.

But the one who foamed at the mouth at my amazing tale was Kokyan. The Priest of Yoki literally stamped and chewed his lips with rage. His hot eyes flickered. The sweat beaded his forehead as he fought for self-control. Again and again he ripped out savage objections or mocking comments. He saw in acceptance of our story double defeat for himself; Wiki's leadership impregnably fortified and another bar thrown betwixt himself and Kachina.

"The red stranger lies," he stormed—Wiki translating his critcisms with gleeful assistance from Kachina, who delighted in being at the center of the debate. "If Kachina was of his people why can she not talk to him in his tongue?"

"The Great Spirit took the knowledge from her—for reasons of his own," answered Tawannears, and I translated.

"I can talk in Tawannears' tongue," snapped Kachina. "It comes to me easily." She cast a sly glance at the Seneca. "I am sure I must have known it once."

"It is a lie," howled Kokyan. "Has he not said that this Lost Soul of his was a maid full-grown when she died? And do we not know that Kachina was a child with new teeth when Wiki brought her to Homolobi?"

"The Great Spirit's ways are not our ways," returned Tawannears steadily. "He may change the maid's years, but he can not change her face or the Soul that was lost. What are years to Him?"

"Bah!" snarled Kokyan. "Will wise men believe such tales? Is it likely the Ruler of Death or any other god would allow such wanderers as these to have knowledge of the Heaven-sent?"

Wiki, who had said little after his habit, contenting himself with translating the arguments back and forth, and now and then checking Kachina when she developed a tendency to embroil still further the irate Kokyan, now pursed his lips and sought for safe middle-ground.

"Here is no question to be judged with heat," he declared. "There is much that is strange in what these strangers say. Yet how can priests, who live their lives with what is unreal, be unwilling to believe a tale because it denies what seems truth? It does seem strange to me that Massi, whose servant I am, has never been disposed to acquaint me with what the strangers have said, although often, as you know, he has come to me and made clear the future—to the great good of the village."

At this there were cries of:

"Great is Wiki!"

"Favored above other priests is Wiki!"

"The Chief Priest speaks wisdom!"

"But who am I," continued Wiki, "to expect that Massi will tell me all? No, if he did so, then would I be as great as he, and a god. Perhaps Massi sent these strangers here to tell me this message, instead of summoning me into the desert to fast until wisdom came to me. I do not know. But I do know that the strangers have told us a marvelous tale. If it is true, then, indeed, are we favored of Massi, and Kachina, the Sacred Dancer, is twice-holy. If it is not——"

"How can it be true?" insisted Kokyan boldly. "Chua the Snake, as all know, has taken Homolobi under his protection. Have not I had his confidence for two years past? Has he not told me things which Massi, busy ruling the villages of the dead, has forgotten? Is it likely that Chua would forebear to tell me of so wondrous an occurrence?"

"Chua has told you some things that did not come to pass," flashed Kachina. "You told us he said these strangers would bring bad-luck, and they brought good-luck."

"Yes, that is in their favor," interposed Wiki.

"There has been bickering about them since they set foot in the valley," Angwusi thrust in spitefully.

"There was bickering before," said Wiki sternly. "Enough has been said. We will examine the matter with care. I am Massi's priest, and I serve him in this. Let all——"

He was interrupted by shouts of alarm on the outskirts of the throng of village people who had clustered thickly about the group of priests, edging closer and closer as the discussion became more animated. We all turned in the direction of the disturbance. A lane was being formed through the crowd. Villagers with bows and arrows were forcing back the bystanders to make room for a little knot of squat, naked, brown-skinned men, who walked between the jostling walls with wary glances and startled leaps to avoid contact with those not of their kind.

A murmur rose—

"The Awataba!"

People gave ground more readily when they saw that the new-comers were the bowmen of the rock desert, men a degree or two above the level of the beasts, their bodies crusted with filth, their hair matted, their weapons crudely formed, their bellies protuberant from eating dirt when other food failed, their eyes dully stupid, but alive with animal dread of the unknown. These came forward until they reached the open circle in front of Massi's image, and at first sight of that dread countenance they cast themselves flat upon the ground and wriggled on until their leader was able to put his hand upon Wiki's foot.

The villagers who had attended them made brief report, and Kachina started, bending forward betwixt Tawannears and me, her lips close to my ear.

"This is bad," she whispered. "The field guards say the Awataba have left the cliffs and descended into the valley. They are come to ask Wiki to give you up to them. They——"

But now the Awataba were talking for themselves in awkward guttural clicks and clucking noises, peeping at us from under beetling brows and hanging mats of muddy hair, prostrating themselves anew at a wrinkle showing in Wiki's face; but withal, demonstrating a dumb persistency, a blunt determination, that reminded me of the smokes that swirled daily above the valley cliffs.

Kachina gasped.

"They are asking for you," she interpreted. "They say they have dreamed that if they sacrifice you three their wanderings will come to an end and they will always have food."

Wiki checked her with an order which sent the snake priests to close around us, and they herded us out of the crowd and up to the temple roof, making signs that we were to enter the room assigned to us. In there we could neither see nor hear anything of what went on, and leaving one man to watch us from the terrace, they hastened back to take their share in the decision of our fate.

CHAPTER XIX

PETER'S BOULDER

THERE was no twilight in Homolobi. Buried beneath the jutting overhang of the Western cliff, the village was plunged in darkness the moment the sun had sunk behind it. One minute I looked through the narrow doorway of our room and saw the gaunt figure of the serpent priest, our sentinel, limned against the gray house-walls across the temple plaza. Then the enveloping gloom had swallowed him. Only upon the distant Eastern cliffs of the valley a few crimson beams clashed harshly upon the painted rock strata, flickered courageously—and vanished, too.

But immediately other lights flared up. The plaza, whence rose—had risen this hour past—a continuous hum and buzz of comment, of a sudden glared with torches. More torches shone on the opposite house-roofs, and from the unseen depths of the valley at the foot of the Breast blossomed a great flower of light that grew and grew, accompanied by a muted roar of savage voices, dissonant, unrestrained.

The voices of Homolobi were stilled—as though Wiki had suppressed all with one wave of his feathered *paho*. The village became wrapped in the silence of death. And now our ears could hear distinctly that gritting insanity of frenzied noise, rising and falling with the leaping of the flames that streaked hundreds of feet into the air to illumine the darkness beyond the village walls. They were faint, far away, but the savage insistency of their chorus was unescapable, even when the hum of the village began anew.

"The Awataba," I muttered, more to myself than to the others.

"*Ja*," assented Corlaer. "Der bowmen are madt. Dey go crazy, eh?"

Tawannears said nothing. He had not spoken in the hour which had elapsed since the serpent priests had driven us from the plaza. Until the light failed I had been able to see him sitting motionless, with his back to the wall, his eyes staring into vacancy. Now, I suppose, he occupied the same position. At any rate, I could not see him.

"If we had but a pound of powder and ball between us," I groaned.

"What use?" replied Corlaer. "If you kill all der people in Homolobi we hafe still der Awataba."

"No use," I admitted. "Yet I like not the thought of dying in a trap."

"We will not be deadt alone," the Dutchman grunted. "Ha!"

His exclamation was caused by the soft tread of a foot in the doorway. I jumped to one side, drawing the knife and tomahawk from my belt.

"Into the open!" I whispered.

But Kachina's voice answered me, the sibilant Spanish just loud enough to reach my ear.

"Quiet! 'Tis I."

I extended my arm and clutched her feather garment.

"Alone?" I whispered.

"Yes. Let me in. I— Where is Tawannears?"

The Seneca's voice came from the darkness at my elbow.

"Tawannears is here, Gahano."

The throb of gladness in it sent my heart leaping into my throat. There were tears in my eyes.

She understood him.

"Tell him," she ordered me, with a tinkle of musical laughter, "my name is Kachina."

"She is Gahano to me," was Tawannears' answer.

I felt her press by me, and a moment later her voice reached me again, strangely muffled.

"What I am called matters little," she said. "I think Wiki lies when he says I came from Massi. I seem to remember a time many years ago when I often saw people who were white like you. But that does not matter. Tawannears is a man! And I am tired of priests and their ways.

Aye, a man who would travel as far as Tawannears for a woman is a *man!*"

"We shall all of us go soon upon a longer journey," I returned significantly. "And you, too, if you stay here."

"Yes," she agreed, her voice still muffled.

I thrust out my hand and found her body in Tawannears' arms.

"What?" I gasped in astonishment.

Tawannears laughed softly—and at that note, contented, caressing, Peter, also, indulged in a peal of low laughter.

"Dot's funny," he squeaked. "We come all dis way, andt Tawannears gets her, andt we die quick."

"What did the fat one say?" inquired Kachina, wrenching herself from the Seneca's embrace.

I told her.

"Yes," she said a second time. "Death is here. It is coming. That is why I am here. The Awataba told the council they must have you to sacrifice. They said they dreamed that your lives would appease their gods, but I think that ant Kokyan planted the idea in their heads. I would have said so, but Wiki would not let me, and so I ran away."

"What will the council do?" I asked helplessly.

The hum of the village and the blurred voices of the bowmen at the foot of the Breast rasped through the night.

"They will give you up. Kokyan said there should be no argument. It was sufficient sign of your harmfulness that the Awataba were so emboldened. And when Wiki argued against it, the Bowmen said they would lay waste the valley, even though they all perished for it. Then Angwusi joined with Kokyan, and I spoke as I said."

"Hark!" said Peter.

From the plaza came a bellow of voices.

"The council is ended," exclaimed Kachina. "They are coming."

"A few of them will die," I answered grimly. "You had best go."

"Old fool!" she retorted contemptuously. "You have no wits. They will block up the doorway, and break in upon you from above. You have no chance here."

"Then we will go out into the open."

"No, you shall come with me. I know a way. It is dangerous in daylight, and perhaps we shall all perish; but if we gain the cliff-top we can hold our own. Come! I will lead Tawannears, and do you others follow him."

We moved softly out the door, and she guided us along the wall of the temple's upper story. Here was black night, unmitigated, for the overhang of the cliff shut out even the star-shine. We had passed two other doorways, as I could tell by feeling with my hands, the uproar in the plaza becoming deafening in the mean time, when there was a patter of feet and torches blazed across the terrace. Men streamed by us, indistinct running figures, and we flattened against the wall, trusting to the shifting shadows to conceal us; but a group of a dozen or more with torches made the night briliant as day.

A yell announced our discovery. There was a rush that we stemmed with ready steel, and Kachina cried:

"Run! Do not stay to fight!"

We won a brief respite by our efforts; and she dived into a near-by doorway, and we found ourselves tumbling down a steep stair that twisted on itself and debouched into a vast chamber which we recognized as the temple. Already men were pouring in from the plaza, Kokyan at their head, a torch waving in one hand, a knife in the other. And behind us the restricted stair echoed the shouts of our immediate pursuers.

Kachina ignored Kokyan, and guided us past the tank before the empty altar of Massi, in which writhed the reptile guardians of the shrine; but Kokyan sped around the other, and shorter, side of the temple. The foam was dripping from his jaws; his eyeballs were starting from their sockets. And as he saw Kachina turn toward a doorway that showed dimly behind the altar he shrieked with fury and hurled his torch at her. It would have struck her had not Tawannears reached out and caught it as expertly as he was used to catching the tomahawks thrown at him in practise by his warriors.

An instant Tawannears held the flaming club of resinous pine-wood. Then he sounded the war-whoop of the Iroquois that is dreaded by white man and red from the Great Lakes to the Ohio, and sprang forward to meet the Priest of Yoki. They came together beside the tank of snakes, but Tawannears refused to close, backing away in such fashion that the priest was poised on the very verge of the tank, from which arose an evil tumult of hissing as the snakes responded to the confusion above them.

Pursuit and flight were stayed for the instant by the spectacle of this struggle. Moreover, Peter and I guarded the space betwixt the opposite side of the tank and the temple wall, and no man, not even the snake priests, themselves, cared to try to leap that gap. Kachina, smiling unconcernedly, her feather raiment rising and falling with her even breathing, stood, with hands on her hips, in the doorway behind the tank, watching the contest of the two men for her. If she experienced any misgiving she covered it effectually.

Kokyan howled a curse at the Seneca. Tawannears replied with a smile as unconcerned as the girl's, and the priest stabbed at him desperately, with all the strength of his body behind the blow. Never moving his feet, Tawannears swayed his shoulders to avoid the knife, and struck sidewise with the torch he held in his left hand. It smote the priest on the thigh as he was off-balance, and Kokyan tottered and fell—into the squirming midst of the tank of snakes. Tawannears, without a word, tossed the torch after him, and a bedlam of angry hisses responded. Looking over my shoulder, I shuddered at what I saw.

The Priest of Yoki was submerged beneath a tempest of coiling monsters tortured by the flames of the torch and excited by the unusual light and noise. I had a vision of triangular heads that darted back and forth, of fangs that dribbled venom, of slimy, twisting lengths that coiled and uncoiled and coiled again—and under them all a shape that quivered and jerked and called feebly and was still.

I TURNED and ran, Peter at my heels. The Dutchman's flat, impassive face was a study in horror. Myself, I experienced a nausea that left me weak as I staggered behind Tawannears into the doorway before which ordinarily stood the idol of Massi. Kachina's figure flitted ahead of us, unseen, but notified to our senses by the echo of her feet and low-voiced directions as we came to turns or steps up and down in the course of the passage. And close after us sounded the hue and cry of the pursuit, a confused clamoring of people driven mad with hate.

Indeed, 'twas the stimulus of their hatred flogged me back to self-control. At a corner in the passage, with a glimmer of light beyond advertising its emergence upon some opening, I gripped Peter and bade him stop.

"We must fight them back," I panted. "They do not expect—we shall gain time."

He crouched next me, our bodies blocking the way, and the leaders of the pursuers, rounding the turn at a run, crashed full upon our knives. We flung the two corpses into the mob that pelted after them, slashing and hacking with knives and hatchets in the half-light of the torches, until we had reared a barricade that gave us an opportunity to resume our flight with a trifling lead—for men hesitated to cross the battered heap we had left behind us. Yet we were no more than a dozen paces in the lead when we broke from the passage into a courtyard deep in the cleft of the cliff. In front and overhead towered the peculiar bulging rock formation which protected Homolobi from assault from above. The cliff-top mushroomed out so that it overhung the Breast, and leaning against its base was a double ladder from which Kachina and Tawannears waved us on.

I could not see what use it was to climb to some rock-lodge where we would be picked off in daylight by archers on the temple roof, but there was no time for argument with that yelping horde on our track. Peter and I raced across the court, and rattled up the hide-bound rungs as fast as we could go. There were men on the lower rungs already when we stepped upon a narrow shelf where the girl and Tawannears awaited us.

"Come," she said nervously in Spanish, and plucked the Seneca by the hand.

"Waidt," shrilled Peter solemnly, and he seized the ladder-ends in his huge paws, swayed them tentatively and gave a shove.

The ladder teetered erect on end, poised as if to drop back against the cliff—and went over backward, spilling its load of priests to an accompaniment of fearful screams.

"Now we got a better chance, eh?" commented the Dutchman.

Kachina chuckled with amusement. She had adopted our side unreservedly. The death of these people who had lately almost worshiped her distressed her no more than the slaying of the Awataba in the pass.

"That was a good blow for the fat one," she remarked. "They will set up the ladder again, but we shall have more time, and that means everything."

"How?" I questioned, as I strove to discern a way of escape from the scanty foothold of the rock-ledge.

"I will show you," she answered. "This is a secret path of the priests. Wiki used it when he went into the desert to commune with Massi. But it is very dangerous, and you who are not accustomed to climbing the rocks will have to go slowly. That is why I say the fat one did well to overthrow the ladder. Before they dare to set it up again we shall be able to climb beyond their reach."

She took Tawannears by the hand. He led me, and Peter brought up the rear, and we edged cautiously along the shelf, blessed by our blindness in that we could not see how perilously near eternity we walked. Some twenty feet from where the ladder had rested the ledge terminated in a series of foot and hand-holds ascending a slope, and these we climbed by touch. In that pitch darkness 'twas impossible for one to see the others ahead of him. But we hurried, for behind us we heard the ladder creaking back into place.

The third stage of the path was another ledge, which carried us into a remarkable crevice in the face of the cliff, a kind of natural chimney, evidently a fault in the rock structure caused by some bygone disturbance of the earth's surface. In the crevice it was darker than it had been outside, if that was possible; but the footing was more secure, and we were spurred on by the sounds of our pursuers, better accustomed to such work than we and consequently making twice as rapid progress.

The path was made easier by occasional foot-rests chopped by the priests and by ladder-rungs braced in holes. It trended at first directly into the heart of the cliff, then turned at right angles and ascended diagonally, following a layer of soft rock which I could readily identify with my hands. In two places it was so steep as to demand progress by means of straddling. Atop of the first of these funnels it widened to become a chamber littered with rock fragments, and a beam of moonlight filtering into the somber place revealed a jagged crack along the side toward the valley.

Peter, following me up the second funnel, muttered he could see one of the priests climbing the slant of the path to its beginning, and in my energy to make way for him I deluged him with pebbles and fine gravel. This upper end of the crevice was very brittle, perhaps because it had been long baked in the heat of the sun, and we slipped and slid continually, losing a foot for every yard we scaled. But at last Kachina achieved the top, and helped Tawannears up, and betwixt them, they hauled up Peter and me.

To our surprize, we discovered ourselves to be on the summit of the cliff. Homolobi, of course, was hidden beneath the protuberance of rock that ran eastward many feet from where we stood. Beyond it, though, we could see the full sweep of the valley, dotted with the fires of the Awataba, the silver glitter of the moonlight on the river and the opposite wall of cliffs. The night was very bright and clear, the sky gemmed with a myriad stars, the moon shining full between draperies of purple velvet.

"What now?" I asked.

Kachina shook her head.

"We must keep back the priests from following us," she said. "If we left the path they would soon be close to us again."

"And if we wait," I returned, "they will send back messengers to guide the Awataba here by some other trail. Perhaps they have already done so."

"True," she agreed coolly. "Well, so far I have planned for you. It is time you took thought to save yourselves."

I translated this to the others, and Peter strode instantly to an enormous boulder, lying on its side in a bed of shale.

"We put a cork in der bottle," he announced.

He leaned his shoulder against the boulder, heaved and it rolled over toward the head of the funnel. Another heave and another, and it rested on the funnel's lip. Then Peter shoved it gently with his right arm, there was a shower of gravel, a startled yelp from the bowels of the rocks, and he turned to us, with a broad grin.

"*Ja,* dot's a goodt——"

I thought the end of the world had come. Deep underneath there was a heavy jar, then a sullen, sky-piercing roar that resounded and reechoed, pounding our ears, dazing our senses, louder, ever louder, swelling and bursting into prodigious thunder-peals. A dense cloud of dust rose like a curtain around us. The rock on which we stood jumped as though it had been struck with the hammer of a god. The roar slid off into a declining repetition of earth-shocks. The dust settled slowly. And we looked from a sheer precipice at our feet upon what had been Homolobi.

Peter's boulder, bounding down the funnel in the cliff, must have encountered a fault in the rock, possibly the jagged crack I had noted above the first funnel, and with the momentum it had gathered and its accompanying wave of small stones and gravel, had started forces which had torn from the face of the cliff the overhanging projection which had shielded Homolobi from attack for centuries. This mass in falling, had planed off the top of the Breast, and was now a sloping hill of rock-fragments which stretched far into the valley.

Under it lay the people and the houses of Homolobi, their store-houses and choicest gardens and most of the Awataba, who had gathered close to the foot of the Breast to await the issue of their demands. It was the most utter, tragic ruin I have ever seen. The dust clouds seethed above the wreckage like the smoke of successful fires, but no fires could have been so successful. There were not left even ruins or ashes. Homolobi was abolished. It was gone without a trace to show where it had been.

Kachina cast herself at Tawannears' feet. "How mighty are your gods!" she moaned. "I am yours. Save me from them."

Tawannears lifted her in his arms.

"Gahano need have no fear," he said proudly. "Tawannears' medicine is strong. All who oppose him shall perish. But Gahano is safe. Surely, Hawenneyu has us in His keeping that he should visit such destruction upon our enemies! He will send the Honochenokeh to guard us. Tharon the Sky-holder will let the clouds fall upon those who stand in our way. Gaoh will blow the winds against them. Tawannears' orenda will triumph over all!"

CHAPTER XX

THE SPOTTED STALLION

WE WERE free, but new problems arose to confront us. Our only weapons were the knives and tomahawks in our belts. We were stranded all but defenseless in a desolate, unknown country. Without the protection afforded by our muskets 'twas exceedingly doubtful whether we could travel far in face of strong hostile opposition. The Awataba, any tribe of archers, easily could overwhelm us. Moreover, Winter was coming on. Autumn was actually at hand. There were the twin questions of food and shelter to be answered. And finally, we had a fourth comrade to feed, protect and clothe.

But on this final score we had no occasion for worry, as events soon showed. Kachina might acclaim the superior accessibility which Tawannears enjoyed with the high gods, but her native self-reliance, courage and intelligence refused to acknowledge the handicap of her sex. At the very beginning of her association with us she claimed and fulfilled the rôle of an equal—proving in this, as in countless other ways, that she was of Spanish blood, no ordinary Indian maiden to accept meekly the drab duties of a squaw. Tawannears, somewhat to my amusement, accepted her at her own valuation.

The Seneca possessed a streak of innate chivalry entirely different from the normal attitude of courteous toleration which the People of the Long House entertain for their women. No nation anywhere that I have read of in history give their wives and mothers greater honor than these barbarians of the forest. 'Tis the women who select the candidates for the high rank of Royaneh, the noble group of leaders who form the Hoyarnagowar, the ruling body of the Great League. They arrange marriages, and largely control clan politics. A warrior of the Hodenosaunee says that he is the son of his mother, not of his father, when you ask his name. Beyond all other Indians, aye, and beyond all white men, they yield power and place to women.

But as a race they treat women as a sex apart. The lives the men live are denied to the women. Of love, in the sense that we entertain it, an affection transcending the arbitrary bounds of physical affinity, they are ignorant. Tawannears, alone, joined to the sex courtesy of the Hodenosaunee the white man's capacity for a flaming spiritual devotion. He loved with all his being, he worshiped, he felt a joyous sense of service based on an equality of partnership. So much, at least, of what they sought to achieve the missionaries had wrought into his character. Let it be said for them that they supplied him with the mainspring of his life.

So it was that, having asserted the protection of his gods, the superiority of his orenda over all powers which might be brought against it, he proceeded, with the naïveté that was a cardinal point of his character, to admit the validity of the aid she was able to give us, aid without which, I believe, we must have perished. Nor did he, then or ever, treat her as a squaw, a woman, to be honored in the lodge and debarred from warriors' councils. And this, I must say clearly, has seemed most odd to me. For the real Gahano or any other Indian maid must naturally have adopted the habits, the ways of thought, bred into her. Yet never did Tawannears doubt the truth of the miraculous exploit he credited to himself.

So sure was he that he never mentioned it thereafterward. It had been a gift from Hawenneyu, a recognition of human endurance and loyalty. Very well, then, he took what Hawenneyu gave, offered thanks and went his way. Why talk of the obvious? Any one, so Tawannears reasoned in his blend of Christian philosophy and pagan faith, who strove hard enough could do what he had done. It had been done before, he believed. He did not even question the failure of Jouskeha—or Wiki—to seal his Lost Soul in the pumpkin-shell in which she had first appeared, and deliver her to him so. The gods, no more than men, must do everything in the same way each time they undertook it. They had acted toward him as they saw fit. He refused to quibble over details. He was satisfied.

I have said that without Kachina we should have perished. Mayhap I exaggerate, but nevertheless 'tis true that she was the means of guiding us from the cliff-top above the grave of Homolobi down to the valley-floor, which we had need to pass to gain the eastern vents. 'Twas she who skirted the ragged mound the rock-slide had formed, and solved the first of our difficulties by retrieving two bows and a quiver of arrows which certain of the Awataba had cast aside in flight. As weapons these were not much, crudely made, lightly strung, with flint-tipped arrows none too straight or dependable in flight; but they were better than nothing.

Kachina, too, collected corn and vegetables from the standing fields and gardens on the far side of the river, which had been undamaged by the catastrophe, and with these she cooked us tasty stews that helped us to fight down the pangs of hunger we experienced as meat-eaters. And 'twas she who knocked over a turkey of one of the village flocks and afforded us thus a more substantial meal the next evening. And she knew the best passes and ravines leading from the valley, and saved us weeks of wandering, and very likely, death from starvation or at the hand of some hostile tribe, when we resumed our journey to the east.

She was a maid as quick in wit and devotion as in temper, scornful of Peter's bulk whilst she respected his strength, affecting for me an amused toleration as of one incomparably aged, an incumbrance to be admitted for sake of Tawannears. I think at first she was attracted by the Seneca because of the novelty of his case, the strange part it gave her to play, the whimsical sensation of being one reborn again, an accepted intimate and favorite of the gods. But there can be no question she grew to love him with devotion akin to his own. He was a man amongst millions, aye, in the very words she used, a *Man!*

Both Peter and I, whom she plagued and teased like the child she was, came to love her as a sister and a true comrade, and because of her mingling of Indian unconsciousness and stoicism and white woman's coy mannerisms. 'Twas Peter, for instance, insisted upon taking from her the ridiculous costume of turkey feathers, which was all she had to wear. For herself, she gave it not a second's thought. I daresay it was fairly warm, if unsubstantial, and she had as little false modesty as might be expected in one who was convinced of her semi-divinity. Peter fashioned for her instead a neat costume of moccasins, breeches and coat, which he contrived from his own raiment, going afterward almost as naked as the Awataba until good fortune threw in our way the chance to replenish ourselves. But I am again galloping in advance of my story, an ill trick, and to be attributed to the garrulity of old memories stirred afresh.

With weapons and food for the time-being, our next concern was as to shelter for the Winter, and on this point we were all agreed—we desired to get as far as possible from this valley of death before the cold weather and the terrible snows prevented traveling and inasmuch as Tawannears' search was ended there was no question but that we should go east. Had we been by ourselves we three would have elected to follow the stream which flowed through the plantations of what had been Homolobi—and we should have been led hundreds of miles to the southward. It was by Kachina's advice that we chose a ravine which carried us due east into a more favorable country, where game was abundant.

We had feared the attentions of the remnants of the Awataba, but if any were left they gave us a wide berth, nor did we see signs of other savages, until we came to a considerable river some four days' journey from the edge of the rock desert, where we were attacked by a small band of stalwart warriors, whom Kachina called Navahu. They came at us boldly, seeing how few we were, and we pretended to flee behind a thicket; but as they approached us there we charged upon them with heavy clubs of wood that Peter had cut, and at the sight of our white, bearded faces they lost all their ardor and tried to escape, crying that we were Naakai, by which, it seems, they meant Spaniards. We overtook and plundered several of them, besides raiding their camp on the river-bank, and so became possessed of some handsomely woven robes or blankets, which Kachina assured us were highly prized by all the tribes in these regions.

Hitherto Peter and I had been obliged to content ourselves with clubs to supplement our knives and tomahawks, it being manifestly the wisest policy to award our two bows to Tawannears and Kachina, who were more expert archers than we. Now we acquired two more bows and nearly two quivers full of arrows, and plucking up our courage, deemed ourselves equipped to encounter any resistance short of musketry. We swam the river without difficulty, and continued east, being halted presently by a barrier of foot-hills beyond a smaller stream. Long since we had passed the confines of Kachina's narrow geographical knowledge, and after discussing the situation we decided to follow this stream north.

When it turned abruptly west three days afterward we were crestfallen, but we agreed to keep to its banks for one day more; and our perseverance was rewarded, for we discovered that it flowed into a larger river, apparently the one we had first crossed, which seemed to come down from the northeast. 'Twas in this direction we felt vaguely that we should aim, and we made the best progress the broken ground afforded. Several days' rough traveling brought us to a third stream, which joined our river from the east. Ahead loomed range after range of rocky peaks; southeast the prospect[1] was also forbidding. We made the only decision possible, and headed east up the course of this new river. Of course, it might have carried us anywhere, as in this land the streams seemed to be coming from and flowing toward all directions; but it was our good-fortune that its head waters were high on the western slopes of the Sky Mountains, and we were able to Winter in a glorious valley such as had been our home the year previous.

We built a comfortable cabin of two rooms, and had all the food we needed. Indeed, we grew fat and sleek, and Peter, with his clever hands, made us new garments of deerskin. The blankets we had captured from the Navahu kept us warm. And we whiled away the hours when we were not hunting or working on pelts by cutting and straightening arrow-shafts, chipping and fastening stone-heads and adjusting the feathering. We were better armed than ever, and Peter and I improved in our shooting, although we could never hope to rival archers like Tawannears and Kachina, who had drawn bows since childhood—just as they were incomparably less expert than the marvelous bowmen of the Plains tribes, who spend their whole lives in attaining proficiency in this weapon, thanks to their being entirely dependent upon it and unable to secure firearms.

SPRING set us afoot again. We delayed our departure from the cabin until we were certain the last snow storm had blanketed the mountains, but once we started we moved rapidly, as Tawannears had shaped snow-shoes for all of us, and the soggy crust packed firm. Two weeks' journey fetched us across a divide of land, a mountain-ridge running due north and south, and we descended by a series of valleys which carried us out

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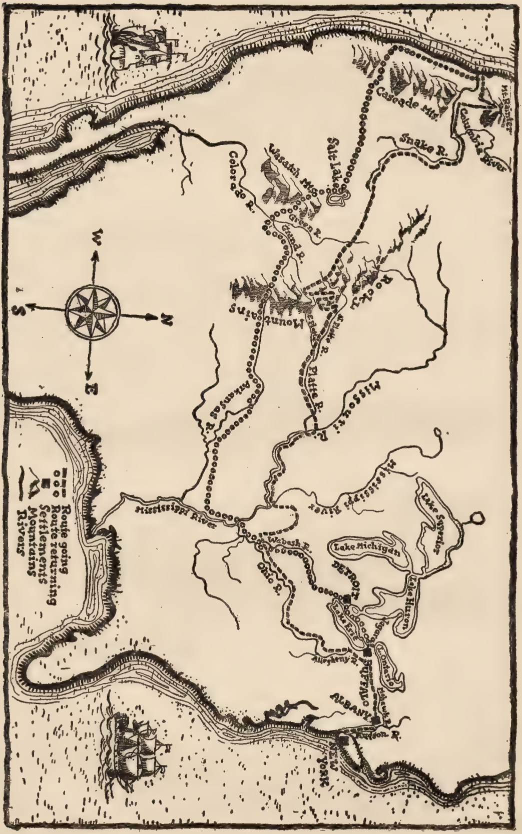
[1] Ormerod's course grows increasingly difficult to trace, but I hazard a guess he came out of some point in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah, crossed the Grand and followed that river to the Gunnison.—A. D. H. S.


W
S
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Route going
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Settlements
Mountains
Rivers
Cascade Mts.
Mt. Rainier
Columbia River
Snake R.
Salt Lake
Wasatch Mts.
Colorado R.
Green R.
Grand R.
Rocky Mountains
S. Platte R.
Platte R.
Arkansas R.
Missouri R.
Mississippi River
Mississippi River
Lake Superior
Lake Michigan
Lake Huron
Wabash R.
Ohio R.
DETROIT
Lake Erie
Niagara
L. Ontario
Allegheny R.
BUFFALO
ALBANY
Mohawk R.
Hudson R.
NEW YORK

of the mountains through a gateway betwixt two gigantic peaks that reared skyward many miles apart.[1]

We encountered a river flowing east, which already was gathering size and force from the melting snows of countless minor streams. For want of more accurate guidance we followed its southern bank, abandoning it twice, when it seemed to deviate to the north, and striking eastward in a beeline, although in each of these instances we picked up the river again.

On this comparatively low tableland the snow had disappeared, and the long grass and foliage were greening out. There was no lack of antelope and deer, and we saw frequent herds of buffalo, the advance-guards of the vast migrations which were shifting from the southern feeding-grounds. We were now in the country of the horse Indians, those wide-ranging tribes whose bands ride hundreds of miles for a handful of booty or a scalp, lovers of fighting by preference, and we were at pains to avoid all contact with them. Twice we hid in the grass to let gorgeously feathered parties ride past. Once we lay in a patch of timber by the river-bank, unable to move, and watched a band make camp.

But we could not hope to be successful always, especially as the country became flatter and less adaptable for concealment as we traveled east. There arrived a day when the river looped north, and we abandoned it for the third time, squaring our backs to the westering sun and entrusting ourselves to the open plains. The grass here was still short of its midsummer luxuriance. Cover was negligible, and the land rolled evenly in gigantic swells. We were climbing one of these, weary and anxious to reach a water-supply, as a war-party rode over the crest, fifty painted warriors in breechclouts and moccasins, long hair stuck with feathers, white shields and lance-points glistening, quivers bristling with arrows.

They howled their amazement, and swept down upon us, two of their number racing up the swell behind us to make sure we were not the bait of a larger band, lying in ambush. We bunched together, and made the peace sign, arms up-thrust, palms out. But the newcomers rode warily around us in a contracting circle, their lances slung, arrows notched, ready to overwhelm us with a rain of shafts from horn-bound bows that could shoot twice as far as ours. When the scouts scurried back with yells of reassurance, they reduced the circle they had strung until we were fairly within bow-shot from all sides. Then a chief, resplendent in eagle's feathers, hailed us in a sonorous dialect marked by rolling r's. Tawannears started at the words.

"They are the Nemene, or Comanche," he exclaimed. "We are in grave danger, brothers. These men are the mightiest raiders on the plains."

"Shall we fight them?" I asked.

"Yes," approved Kachina, notching an arrow. "Let us fight them."

"What does der chief say?" asked Peter. "Can you understand?"

"A part. I have heard the Comanches talk when they came north to trade with the Dakota. I will try them in Dakota."

Tawannears shouted his answer, and the Comanche chief summoned a warrior to interpret.

"He asks who we are," Tawannears explained swiftly after a brief interchange of words. "I have told him. He says that we must come with him to his camp."

There was another interchange of remarks.

"I have told him we are hurrying to our own land, that we mean no harm to his people, but he will not agree to let us go. He says we are on his people's land, and we should have asked permission to come here. I will say that we were looking for him, but——"

Tawannears shrugged his shoulders.

Once more the shouted questions and answers, accompanied by signs and gestures, and the ring of warriors commenced to weave around us again. The chief rode leisurely to one side, and regarded us indifferently. His interpreter shouted two words.

"It is no use, brothers," said Tawannears. "We are to throw down our weapons or they shoot."

"Is it a question of dying now or later?" I asked resentfully.

"It looks so."

"Let us die here in the open," proposed Kachina fearlessly.

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[1] This tends to confirm the theory that Ormerod followed the Gunnison east, crossed the Continental Divide near Cannon City, and came down into the valley of the Arkansas, with Pike's Peak on his left and Spanish Peak visible in the distance.—A. D. H. S.

"*Nein*," spoke up Peter. "If we fight here, we die, Dot's sure. If we go with dem, we die—maype. Berhaps not. Not sure, eh? We petter go, *andt wait* andt see. *Ja!*"

The Dutchman was right. We dropped our weapons, and the ring of Comanches swirled in upon itself. We were suddenly in the midst of a sweating mob of men and horses, scowling faces bent over us, rough hands snatching at our possessions; rawhide thongs were lashed about our waists, and the cavalcade dashed away between the swells, each of us running fast to keep up with the horseman who had us in tow, plenty of careless hoofs ready to beat our brains out if we stumbled. But after the first mile they lessened the pace, and toward evening we came into a circle of teepees pitched on the bank of a tiny river.

On one side was a grove of trees, reaching to the high-water mark. Opposite, the pony herd grazed in a natural meadow. We were bound hand and foot and suffered to lie on the grass betwixt the easternmost of the teepees and the horse herd, the adolescents of the herd-guard being summoned to watch us. The chief and his warriors, after exhibiting us to a group of several hundred people, including women and children, shooed them all away and left us, evidently to decide how to treat us—which, apparently, meant how to end us.

The shadows lengthened steadily, but nobody brought us food. Now and then a man lounged over to test our bindings or look at us. Women and children who sought to stare at us further were importantly warned off by the herd-guards. The light was failing, too—so much so that I was surprized at feeling a cold muzzle thrust against my cheek. A delighted whinny greeted me.

I twisted my head around, and looked up into the quivering nostrils of a mottled stallion. He nuzzled me again, whinnying with every appearance of recognition, his white mane ruffling in pleasure. I spoke to him softly, and he buried his muzzle in my neck, pawing with his forehoof as though inviting me to rise and mount him. Yes, there was no doubt of it. He was Sunkawakan-Kedeshka, the spotted horse, that I had tamed at Nadoweiswe's Teton village in the north before we first crossed the Sky Mountains.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STAMPEDE

"WHAT is this, brother?" whispered Tawannears beside me.

I explained, and Kachina and Peter rolled closer to listen.

"*Wah!*" gasped the girl, when I had finished. "This god Hawenneyu is a great god! He has sent the horse to aid us to escape."

"How can that be?" I answered her peevishly. "We lie here bound and helpless. If the whole herd came and waited next the stallion we could not use them."

"Nevertheless, it is good medicine," insisted Tawannears. "My heart grows strong again."

"*Ja*," agreed Peter with more interest than he usually exhibited. "We hafe der middle of an egscape. If we get der first part——"

Sunkawakan-kedeshka's silken ears shot forward across my face. I heard the padding of moccasined feet.

"The herd-guard!" I exclaimed. "Remember, I am crying out in fear. The stallion is biting me."

And straightway I gave vent to a series of fearsome shrieks, at which the spotted stallion drew back in amazement, unable to understand the antics of the man he considered his friend. The youthful herdsman broke into a run, and Tawannears hailed him in a mixture of Dakota and Comanche phrases:

"Come quickly! Is this the way to treat captives? The horse is biting my white brother!"

The Comanche laughed, peering through the starlit darkness, and I noted with interest that as soon as he identified the horse he approached with marked caution.

"The spotted horse will give him an easier death than our warriors at the torture-stake," he exulted. "What are teeth and hoofs to the knife and fire? If I leave the horse he will soon make an end of the Taivo.[1] But tomorrow will tell another story. The Taivo will linger for hours, begging for the hatchet."

"They say your father would dress you in women's garb and beat you with switches if any harm came to the Taivo before the Council decided his fate," said Tawannears sternly. "Mount the horse and ride him away."

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[1] White man.

"Mount the spotted horse!" returned the boy with derision. "Never! Not one of our warriors has been able to back him since we raided him from the Teton."

"No, for they are Comanches," sneered Tawannears.

The boy dealt him a lusty kick in the ribs, and drove off the stallion with thrusts of the light lance he carried. Hoofs pawing and teeth flashing, Sunkawakan-kedeshka gave me one look of regret, emitted a whinny of hurt inquiry and faded into the darkness.

"What do you mean, Peter, by the middle of an escape?" I whispered curiously, as soon as the herd-guard was out of hearing.

"Der first part," answered the Dutchman, "is getting off der thongs. Dot we hafe to do. Der middle part is finding a way to leafe der village. Dot we hafe in der horse——"

"How?" demanded Tawannears.

"He is a king of horses," returned Peter placidly. "Hafe you forgot der lidtle band of mares he ledt at Nadoweiswe's village? What he does, der herd will do."

"'Tis true," I assented eagerly. "With him to aid us, we could stampede the herd."

"But why talk of such things when we are helpless?" was Tawannears' gloomy comment.

"We are not helpless," interrupted Kachina.

She rolled herself over and over until she lay on her stomach close to Tawannears.

"The warrior who bound my wrists did not tie them so tight as yours," she explained. "I smiled at him, and I think he means to ask the Comanche chief to let him take me into his teepee—the ant! If he did I would kill him with his own knife. If your teeth are sharp as mine you can gnaw the knots loose. Then I will free the rest of you."

And as Tawannears hesitated in bewilderment at her suggestion, she continued:

"Hurry! The eagles are singing of victory in the sky. They say we shall defy the Comanche."

"Yes, yes," I pleaded. "Make haste, brother. The herd-guards may come again."

So Tawannears rolled himself into a position where he could bring his strong teeth—the teeth of a barbarian, exempt from white man's ills—to bear upon the girl's knotted wrists, triced in the small of her back just above the hips. And whilst he labored at the tough hide thongs, Peter and I kept watch for the return of the adolescent. Had he come we planned to give warning, and Kachina and Tawannears would have resumed their customary attitudes, but we saw no more of him. I think he and his friends were taking turns sneaking into the village to listen outside the Council teepee to the debate of the warriors on our fate, and this meant more work for those watching the grazing horses. For twice I heard the distant whinny of Sunkawakan-kedeshka, evidently challenging my attention, and I suspect it required one boy's vigilance to restrict his wanderings, alone.

Time dragged slowly, and the Seneca's lips became slippery with blood from his torn gums. I took his place, and when I was worn out, Peter's heavy jaws assumed the burden. 'Twas he wrenched the last knot loose; but several moments passed before Kachina was able to restore the circulation in her hands. Then she unbound her ankles, and without waiting to rub her feet back to life, fell to upon our lashings. In ten minutes we were all four free, crawling—we could not have walked had we tried—toward the herd.

Our plan was simple. It had to be. We advanced until we could descry the figures of two of the herd-guards against the faint starlight, unkempt, naked striplings, lances wandlike in their right hands. On this, the village side, the task was easier, and so most of the guards were on the flanks and opposite to our position. Beyond the two guards was the restless mass of horses, some hundreds of them, grazing, fighting, rolling, sleeping.

Tawannears and I stripped off our shirts and breeches, and so assumed the general aspect of Comanche warriors, crawled back a short distance and then ran forward openly, as though we were carrying a message from the village. The two guards heard the patter of our moccasins and rode in to meet us, quite guileless, probably taking us for certain of their comrades. When they called to us, we answered with grunts, puffing mightily. They never suspected us. I was beside my man, had one hand on his thigh, before he guessed aught was wrong, and as he opened his mouth to cry a warning I had him by the throat and throttled the life out of him. His cry was no more than a gurgle in the night. Tawannears was even more expeditious.

To our left we heard another pair of guards talking together. They may have detected the choked cry of the one I killed. At any rate, we could not afford to pause to establish a plan for meeting them. Tawannears softly called up Kachina and Peter, and I rode into the herd, whistling for Sunkawakan-kedeshka. He answered me at once. A long-drawn-out whinny of delight, and he battered his way to my side with flying hoofs. I swung from the herd-guard's horse to his back, and trotted over to my friends.

"Quick, brother!" hissed Tawannears.

He pointed at two mounted figures that loomed perilously close. One of them hailed at that moment, mistaking me for a brother guard. I growled something indistinct in my throat, and heaved Kachina up in front of me, holding her in my arms and twisting my fingers in the stallion's mane in place of reins. He did not tremble under the extra weight, only tossed his head and whickered—much to my gratitude, for I was by no means sure how he would regard a double load, and I could not leave the girl by herself, considering she had never ridden before, nor to one of the others who were scarcely less ignorant of horsemanship.

Tawannears and Peter climbed gingerly on the horses of the slain guards, and we plunged into the center of the herd.

"Hah-yah-yah-yaaaa-aaa-aa-ah-hhh-yeeee-eee-ee!"

The war-whoop of the Long House split the silence of the night. It excited Sunkawakan-kedeshka to a frenzy. Tawannears and Peter thrust right and left with their captured lances. Half-tamed at best, these horses were restless of all restraint, and they reacted immediately to the turmoil. A shrill scream from the spotted stallion produced a chorus of responses. Mares fought to reach his side. Other stallions fought to keep them away. The herd went wild. Kicking, biting, neighing, screaming, it smashed aside the efforts of the herd guards to stop it and pelted southeast into the open prairie.

And in the midst of it my comrades swayed in their seats, in danger at any instant of being knocked to the ground. And Kachina and I clung desperately to the bare back of the stallion, his great muscles lifting him along at a stride which soon placed him in the fore of the stampede.

I saw one boy go down in the path of the mad rush, he and his mount trampled to a pulp. Others rode wide, shouting the alarm. The village behind us rocked to the thunder of hoofs; a cry of dismay rose to the stars that blinked in the dim vault overhead. Then teepees, herd-guards, warriors, trees and river were gone in the darkness. We were alone with our plunder on the prairie, all around us tossing heads and manes, flirting hoofs, lean barrels stretched close to the ground, tails flicking the grass-tips.

Mile after mile, the cavalcade pounded on, and I knew the discomforts my comrades must be suffering. But I could not stop. Nobody could have stopped that wild flight. I doubt if I could have stopped the spotted stallion in the first hour. All I could do was to grip him tight with my knees, cling to Kachina and pray he and his fellows would pick fair ground in the darkness.

It was near dawn when I judged there was a chance of success to stay the herd. I began with the stallion, calming him, soothing his nerves, and gradually, my influence extended to the horses surrounding him, mostly his attendant mares, as well as a few colts. No foals could have kept up with our rush. In fact, we had been dropping horses by the way for three hours or more. Those that were left were the hardiest, and their eyes were bloodshot, their flanks wet with foam, their lungs bursting. I slowed the troop to a canter, to a trot, Tawannears and Peter seconding me as well as they could. Finally, we pulled them to a walk, and induced them to graze.

I felt safe enough. We had traveled at a terrible pace, and the Comanche had no means of keeping up with us. Also, we were all exhausted, and I had designs for making use of our plunder which made me unwilling to founder the herd. So we sought shelter in a grove of trees, driving in there the stallion's immediate following, and permitting the other horses to graze at will, whilst we four slept through the forenoon.

Upon awaking, we killed a colt for food, taking pains to dispatch him in a part of the wood down-wind from his kind, and after eating I put into effect the plan I had designed to cover our future trail. Tawannears, Peter and I cut out of the ruck of the herd a score of the choicest ponies, which we drove into the wood to join Sunkawakan-kedeshka's cohort, guarded for the time being by Kachina. And this being done, we chased the remainder south, frightening them with bunches of burning grass. If the Comanches or others picked up our trail now they would be much more likely to follow the larger body, as evidenced by the area of hoof-prints, and we might continue undisturbed upon our eastward journey, with a quantity of superfluous horseflesh to trade for weapons or food, besides a provision of remounts for ourselves to expedite our progress.

We left the grove at sunset and rode at a leisurely pace until the stars told us it was midnight, camping in the open close to a rivulet where there was ample grass and water for the horses. The next day we traveled as far as a second grove of trees on the banks of a considerable stream, which we concluded was the river we had followed eastward from the base of the Sky Mountains, and we made a halt of two days here to rest the herd and determine in our minds what our next step should be. I was all for continuing east as we were, but Tawannears and Peter held that our wisest course was to cross the river and head north to the Dakota country, where we should be among friends and might be able to rely upon an escort to the Mississippi. But, as usual, fate intervened and relieved us of the burden of the decision.

We were arguing back and forth on the afternoon of the second day, the horses grazing in the confines of the grove under the supervision of Kachina, who, with a little practise, had become as skilled a herd-guard as a shepherdess of turkeys, when we were disturbed by a call from her. She beckoned us to the bluff above the river.

"Strange people over there," she said, pointing.

The stream here was not more than a hundred or two hundred yards wide and in the clear air we could see the new-comers distinctly. They were plainly a returning war-party, travel-stained, badly cut-up, the worse for their adventures. Of sixty or more warriors within view ten or a dozen bore evidence of wounds. Their lances were broken. Their buffalo-hide shields were cut and hacked. But their horses were in the saddest plight of all. One lay down and died as we looked. Others could never move from where they stood.

Tawannears' eyes gleamed.

"Here is fresh favor from Hawenneyu," he exclaimed.

"How so?" I demanded.

"These people need horses. We need arms. We will make a trade with them."

"They look like very bad people," objected Kachina.

And in all truth, they were an evil group of swart, thick-set, cruel-visaged savages.

"No matter," asserted the Seneca. "They are on the far side of the stream from us. We will see that they stay there until we have finished our business with them. Otetiani and Tawannears will ride across and talk to their chief, and Gahano and Peter must move briskly about the wood to appear a numerous band. Lead the horses around where they can be seen. Call to one another. Walk about where they can see a part of you. We shall fool them. Their need is bitter."

NONE of us was disposed to argue with him, for if the need of the strange savages was bitter, ours was no less so. We had two lances wherewith to hunt and to defend ourselves, not even a knife amongst the four of us. Weapons we must have to dare traverse this tremendous sweep of open country, roamed by the most predacious Indians on the continent.

I whistled up the spotted stallion and one of his mares, and Tawannears and I mounted and rode forth from the trees, making a great play as we came into the open on the river bank of handing over our lances and other dummy weapons to Peter, who straightway marched back into the wood. We also pretended to shout orders to different points along the bank, and the Dutchman and Kachina whooped answers to us or responded with whistle-signals. The band on the opposite bank had dragged themselves to their feet, and stared sullenly at us as we splashed into the shallows, and with upraised arms signaling peace.

"They look much stouter than any tribe we have seen," I remarked. "Why, they wear body-armor, cuirasses of buffalo-hide! There is one has an arrow still sticking under his arm."

Tawannears frowned.

"Kachina was right," he said. "These are bad people. I remember now. They are the Tonkawa[1]."

"Who are they?" I asked.

We were not yet within earshot of them as they clustered on the bank.

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[1] Literal meaning—"They-all-stay-together."

"Chatanskah often told Tawannears of them when I first dwelt with Corlaer in his teepee years go. They are the scourge of the plains. They have no home, but go wherever they please, hunting and killing. Their hands are raised against all other people's. They have no allies, no brothers. They make no treaties. They never receive ambassadors. They are ravaging one year in the Spanish countries in the South, or matching lances with the Apache; and the year after they strike the Dakota or the Cheyenne. They are like the wolf-pack. They never abandon their prey, and you must kill all before they abandon an attack. Their favorite food is human flesh."

I shuddered, eyeing askance the bestial visages lowering on the bank, faces as depraved, if more intelligent, than those of the Awataba.

"And we are to bargain with them!" I exclaimed.

"We must, brother. They are great warriors. If we yield to them they will think we fear them, and they will pursue us. Our horses would be bait enough. No, we have come so far, and we can not draw back. We must carry it with a high hand. Be bold. Scowl at them. Show contempt. We have them at our mercy, but it is not convenient for us to attack. That is our position."

We kicked our horses up the slope of the bank, and drew rein in the midst of the half-circle of Tonkawa warriors. Not a weapon was displayed, for that would have been a gross violation of Indian etiquette, and even these free-booters respected the fundamental precepts of the race to some extent. But we were subtly made to feel that every man there itched to twist his knife in our hearts.

I found myself drawing back my lips from my teeth in an animalistic snarl of reciprocal hatred as Tawannears thrust out his two hands with the forefingers crossed at right-angles, the figure in the universal sign-language for the desire to trade. When a young warrior tried to crowd his horse closer I touched Sunkawakan-kedeshka with my heel, and the spotted stallion shoved the offender off the bank. The youngster scrambled up again, a murderous look on his face, but the Tonkawa chief, a broad-shouldered giant of a man, wearing the hide cuirass and a feathered helmet, spat out a guttural order which curbed the tide of hatred.

"What do you want?" he demanded roughly in the broken jargon of Comanche, which passed for the trade language of the plains.

CHAPTER XXII

OUR TRADE WITH THE TONKAWAS

"WE HOLD this ford," replied Tawannears in the same dialect, speaking with arrogant emphasis.

The two conducted their conversation after the remarkable fashion of the Plains tribes, the basis of their speech being such Comanche phrases as they had in common, pieced out with Dakota, Pawnee, Arickara, Cheyenne and Siksika, and when they were at a loss for a common vocal ground of understanding, reverting to the flexible sign-language, by which they never failed to convey the most complicated meanings.

Occasionally one of the leading Tonkawa warriors would intervene with a suggestion or a word if his chief seemed at a loss, but the debate was mainly a two-man affair.

"Who are you?" returned the Tonkawa haughtily, yet impressed by our swaggering manner.

"We are of no tribe," said Tawannears. "We are outlaws and fugitives. We ravage all whom we meet."

"Not the Tonkawa," commented the chief, with what on a civilized face I would have termed a grin of mild amusement.

"Yes, the Tonkawa, if they attempt to cross us," rejoined Tawannears.

"How many of the Taivo have you in your band?" inquired the Tonkawa, changing the subject.

"We have many," Tawannears lied easily. "This one you see with me is an In-glees. He is an exile from his people, a murderer. We have Franquis and Espanyas, Dakota and Shawnee, men of every tribe, including some from beyond the Sky Mountains. We have just raided a Comanche village and run off their herd."

This statement created the sensation Tawannears intended it should—for two reasons: the Comanches were enemies no tribe despised, and the suggestion of unusual wealth in horseflesh appealed to the special needs of the Tonkawa.

"That is well," answered the chief, with an evil smirk. "We need horses. We will come over, and take yours."

Tawannears laughed.

"Come, Tonkawas," he invited. "My young men are waiting for you behind the trees. They will shoot you down in the water, and those who reach the land will be fresh meat for the axes of our women."

"You lie," said the Tonkawa. "You are not so many as we."

"There are thirty warriors behind those trees," asserted Tawannears. "How many of you would die before you had their scalps—or before they fled?"

"We need horses," reiterated the chief. "We are not afraid to die. We are warriors. We are Tonkawa."

A murmur of savage approval, like the growl of a wolf-pack, answered him from his men.

"That is good hearing," said Tawannears lightly. "But the Tonkawa do not think straight. There is a cloud over their eyes. They say their medicine is weak."

"Why?"

"The Comanche are pursuing my people. They will be here soon, following the tracks of our horses. If we are here they will fight us. If you are here they will fight you. If you drive us away and capture the Comanches' horses, none the less will they attack you. How many of the Tonkawa would be left, after fighting us, to meet the Comanches?"

The Tonkawa pondered.

"We need horses," he said for the third time. "Give us what we require, and we will go away without harming you."

Tawannears roared with laughter.

"They say the Tonkawa are men of blood," he answered, wiping the tears from his eyes. "But they are really men who play with mirth."

A growl of muffled rage came from the Tonkawa band.

"Why should two wolf-packs attack each other when the deer are thick on every side?" Tawannears continued. "It is as I say, the eyes of the Tonkawa are filled with the blood from their wounds. They can not see straight. They do not understand that my people do not fear them. Do you think we should have ridden to meet you, giving warning of our presence, if we had been in fear of you? I tell you, Tonkawas, you stand in more peril than we!"

This time there was no answering growl, and the Tonkawa chief muttered briefly in council with several of his older warriors.

"Why do you come here, then?" he asked bluffly.

"To trade," was Tawannears' prompt response.

"What? We are not traders. You can see we carry only weapons. We have been on a mission of vengeance." His voice swelled boastfully. "The Kansas slew a small hunting-party of our people many moons ago. Three sleeps back we burned their village, and filled our bellies with their blood. Their scalps hang on our lances."

It was true. The Tonkawa lances were broidered from midways of their shafts to the head with wisps of human hair of all lengths.

Tawannears nodded tranquilly.

"That is well," he said. "It is the fashion of my band to slay all who cross our trail. It we had not something else in view we should slay you."

The Tonkawa leaned forward in his pad-saddle, jaw menacing.

"Be careful or we test your boasts!" he cried.

"You dare not," returned Tawannears casually.

And by the very gentleness with which he said it he carried conviction. The Tonkawa looked from him to the waving branches of the wood on the other side of the stream. It might conceal anything. There were horses grazing here and there, and at frequent intervals a figure showed between the trunks, never for long enough to supply opportunity for identification.

"You say you come to trade," objected the Tonkawa. "I have told you we have nothing to trade—except scalps."

He grinned the insinuation that we were the kind of warriors who were careless how we added to our tale of trophies. Tawannears ignored the gibe.

"Yet you have that which we require," replied the Seneca.

He pointed to the full quivers that hung at every warrior's back.

"Ho!" laughed the Tonkawa. "So you are weaponless!"

"It is true," answered Tawannears as gently as he had spoken before, "that we have shot away most of our arrows, but we have sufficient to account for you. Will you try us?"

"Why should we believe you?" derided the chief. "Do the Tonkawa trade like the Comanches?"

"What we seek is means to trade better with the Comanches," retorted Tawannears, a shaft which drew grim chuckles from his hearers.

The Tonkawa, for all their debased habits and uncouth manners, possessed the marked sense of humor which all Indians enjoy.

"How many horses will you trade?" asked the chief.

"How many do you need?" countered Tawannears.

The chief surveyed the depleted ranks of his band, and held up his ten fingers and thumbs twice—twenty.

Tawannears shook his head.

"That is too many. We do not require enough arrows to pay for them. You would have to empty every quiver."

"You can trade us so many or we will come and take them," threatened the chief.

Tawannears started to knee his horse around to return across the river.

"Wait!" called the Tonkawa. "We will give other weapons."

This was more than Tawannears really had expected—as he later admitted—to maneuver the other side into enlarging the scope of the trade. He went through the form of a consultation with me, and then asked:

"The Tonkawa make fine weapons. That is said everywhere. What will you give for twenty horses?"

"Six quivers of arrows, two bows and a leather cuirass for yourself."

"It is not enough." Tawannears rejected the offer decidedly. "With six quivers you must give six bows—and we will take four cuirasses and ten knives and hatchets."

The Tonkawa scowled furiously.

"Would you leave us weaponless, too?" he howled. "We will first come and take what we require!"

I thought he was in earnest now, but when Tawannears repeated his play of breaking off negotiations, it had the same effect as the first time; and the up-shot of it all was that we agreed to accept six quivers, four bows, two cuirasses, and ten knives and eight hatchets. This was more than we needed, of course, but we had to ask for so much to carry out the pretense of our numbers.

After the terms of the trading had been arranged we came to the question of the means of putting the deal into effect. The Tonkawa chief wanted us to drive the horses over to his side of the river—having first suggested that his band come across and receive their new mounts at the edge of the wood, in order to save us trouble!—and receive the weapons there. But Tawannears finally engaged him to the stipulation that the trade was to be completed in midstream, betwixt four persons on a side, the others of both sides, as he put it, to retire out of arrow-shot from the banks.

This much accomplished, we returned to our friends, rounded up twenty head and brought them to the margin of the bank, Kachina and Peter helping us to handle the herd. The Tonkawa had observed the terms of the agreement, in so far as the retirement of the main body a long bow-shot from the bank; but the four waiting at the water's edge, with the complement of arms, all carried their own weapons, and there was some delay whilst Tawannears rode forward and demanded that they throw down everything, except the goods intended for us.

This created a delay, and Kachina drew my attention to the sudden darkening of the western sky. The day had been murkily close, with a sweating heat. Now the sun was obscured by a haze, and in the west a rampart of leaden-black clouds was heaping above the horizon, lapping over like a series of gigantic waves that tumbled and struggled amongst themselves, lashing out convulsively in long, inky streamers. The air was soggy. Not a breath was stirring.

"A storm is coming," she said. "We must be quick."

"Yes," I agreed, "but we can not take chances with these people. They are treacherous."

"The storm will be worse than the Tonkawa," she affirmed, shrugging her shoulders.

I did not believe her, nor did I give a second thought to what she had said. My attention was confined to the four warriors with whom Tawannears was arguing, and I attached far more importance to what they did than to the approaching storm. As a matter of fact, I was correct in my suspicions, for subsequent events proved that they were meditating a surprize assault upon us, planning to stampede the horses to their side of the stream, and relying upon flight to save them from the friends they still supposed us to have concealed in the wood.

Tawannears spoke forcibly to the Tonkawa chief who was one of the four representatives of his side, and as Peter and I began to drive the horses back toward the wood, he yielded. The four, accompanied by Tawannears, rode into the current, the trade-weapons wrapped in three bundles, one carried by each of the chief's assistants. We turned the horses with some difficulty, and met them half-way. The chief, I think, smelt a rat as soon as he realized Kachina to be a woman.

"*Wah!*" he grunted. "Can not you send warriors to meet warriors?"

"The women who go with our band, fight with our band," returned Tawannears coolly. "They sit with the warriors."

The Tonkawa eyed the wood behind us, and it must have occurred to him that no other figures were in view. But if he considered taking the offensive at that juncture, he abandoned the idea when Peter rode up beside him and clamped huge paws on two of the bundles of weapons. I took the third bundle and passed it to Kachina, intending to keep my hands free for whatever might happen. But the Tonkawa evidently decided to run no unnecessary risks. He and his men skilfully packed the twenty horses together and herded them toward the northern bank. We, on our part, headed south.

WE HAD not reached the shore, when we heard the racket of hoofs and looked back to see the remainder of the Tonkawa streaming down to the bank, the weariest of their mounts flogged to the gallop, lances brandished overhead. Their chief, weaponless as he was, never stopped to retrieve his arms from the northern bank, but put himself at the head of his warriors as they stormed into the water. Splashing, yelling, whooping, they shoved our herd before them, those with failing ponies dropping off in the shallows to mount bare-backed the first fresh horse they could catch.

"Run, brothers!" said Tawannears curtly.

With a blind thought for some such emergency, I had picked for our mounts Sunkawakan-kedeshka and three of his mares. The stallion loved to run; his favorties, I knew, would exert every energy to keep up with him. The four fairly flew up the bank and out upon the prairie. We were a long mile in the lead when the first of the Tonkawas straggled into sight. They would capture the rest of the herd in the wood, but we could not help that. Our one purpose was to place as much distance as possible betwixt us and that demon throng.

It grew darker and darker. The afternoon was well-advanced, but sunset came late these Summer days. The gloom was unnatural. Objects showed distinctly in the gray light, and behind us was formed a strangely vivid picture—a belt of open grass; then the low-lying figures of our pursuers, their ponies stretching to the furious pace; then the green bulwark of the trees; and over all the dense, smoky-black canopy of the storm-clouds, arching nearer and nearer. The sun was blanketed completely. The last patch of blue sky dwindled away in the east. A low moaning sound, as of distant chanting voices made me wonder if the shouts of the Tonkawa could carry so far. Kachina turned in her saddle and pointed.

"Look!" she cried.

We obeyed her. The Tonkawa had stayed their pursuit. They were yanking their horses to a halt. Some of them already were heading back toward the wood. The moaning sound grew louder. The cloud-curtain in the West stretched now from the prairie's floor to the sky's zenith, sootily impenetrable.

"They fear the storm!" cried Kachina.

"It will be very wet," assented Tawannears. "We must wrap up our new bows."

"I tell you there is no need to think of bows," she exclaimed with passionate eagerness. "You have never seen one of these storms or you would know how grave is our peril. The wind blows the grass out of the ground. If it catches us in the open we shall be blown over—horses and all. I have seen them in the valley at Homolobi, and out here it will be worse, much worse!"

"What are we to do?" I asked.

"We must have shelter."

Tawannears and I both laughed.

"The only shelter is in the wood we left," I exclaimed.

"We are fortunate to be out of it," she declared. "Trees blow over. No, we must find a hole, a depression in the ground, anything——"

"Dis way," interrupted Peter calmly.

He turned his horse clumsily to the left and led us down the steep bank of a miniature rivulet, a tributary of the river beside which we had been camping. Under the bank we were out of sight of people on the prairie, and at least partially protected from the storm. At Tawannears's suggestion, we wrapped our new weapons in our clothing—what the Comanches had left us —and stowed them in a hole in the bank. Then, having done all that we could, we sat close together on the ground, holding the horses' rawhide bridles.

The moaning had increased to a dull, vibrating roar, muffled and vague. Jagged splashes of lightning streaked the sky. The air had become chilly cold, and we shivered for want of the clothes we had put aside. There was a peculiar tension in the atmosphere. The horses sensed it. They stamped nervously, jerked around at unexpected noises. The stallion whinnied at me, asking reassurance, and I stroked his muzzle.

"It is long coming," said Tawannears.

"Yes," answered Kachina, "and when it is here we shall be fortunate if we can breathe."

Suddenly, the moaning roar became a deafening scream; the blackness mantled the earth like a garment, and we, huddled close to the ground, felt the shock of a great arm sweeping just above our heads. It was the wind. There was no rain, but a shower of objects began to fall against the opposite wall of the gulch. Shapes, indistinct in the mirk, crashed formless into the bed of the rivulet. The horses were frantic. The stallion snatched back as something sailed past him, and pulled me to my feet. I felt as though a giant's hand had clutched my neck. I began to lift into the air, and knew I was being sucked up. The stallion broke free from me, but I still continued to rise. Then I was violently clutched by the ankles and hauled down to earth.

Peter dragged me against the bank beside him.

"Stay down!" he bellowed in my ear. "Der windt plows you away."

"But the stallion!"

"All der horses are gone. Idt can not be helped."

CHAPTER XXIII

MY ORENDA SAVES US

A LIGHTNING-BOLT exploded with a crash, and a cold, purple radiance briefly illuminated our surroundings. The air was filled with trees, wisps of grass, clods of earth. The distorted bodies of a man and a horse lay against the opposite bank of the depression—'twas they, doubtless, had stampeded our mounts. Apparently they had been hurled there by some caprice of the wind. I had a vision, too, of the strained faces of my comrades—Peter's little eyes very wide, Kachina's hair all tumbled about her face, Tawannears grimly watchful. Then darkness again, and the steady, monotonous roar of the wind, no thing of puffs or gusts, but a stupendous, overpowering blast of sheer strength that no living being could stand up to.

It was tricky and sly, ruthless and resourceful. It dropped pebbles and earth-clods on us. It eddied in the depression and created whirlpools which snatched at us lustfully. And once there was a thud overhead and a crumbling of the bank—and a large tree rolled down upon us, the butt of the trunk missing Kachina by a hand's-breadth. But this last attack was really a blessing in disguise, for presently the rain came, and when the wind let up we were able to prop the tree against the bank, and it furnished some slight shelter, stripped though it was of leaves.

The rain was almost more terrible than the wind. For a while, indeed, the wind continued undiminished, lashing us with slanting columns of water that struck like liquid lances, the drops spurting up half a man's stature from the ground after the impact. Then, as the wind dropped, the rain came down perpendicularly, whipping our naked bodies with icy rods. A chill permeated the air. We were so cold that our teeth chattered. And the cold and the rain and the darkness continued, hour after hour.

How long it lasted I do not know, but I remember noting the lessening of the downpour, its swishing away in the east and the frosty twinkling of the stars. We were all too exhausted to think of anything except rest and we cowered beneath the tree-trunk, huddling close for warmth, and somehow slept. When we awoke the sun was rising, and the air was fresh and clear. The sky was cloudless and a soft blue. But all around us was strewn the wreckage of the storm.

The bodies of the man and horse the lightning-flash had revealed in the night still lay in two heaps of broken bones and pounded flesh. Three other horses, battered beyond recognition, were scattered along the bank of the shallow ravine or river-bed. Peering over the top of the bank we discovered that broad patches of the prairie had been denuded of grass, the underlying earth gouged up as though with a plow. The grove in which we had hidden was hacked and torn, an open swath cut through it, many trees down, all more or less mutilated.

Of the Tonkawas there was not a trace. Whatever the casualties they had sustained, plainly they had fled from so unlucky a spot; and that they had suffered by the storm we were convinced by ascertaining that the dead man the wind had blown into our hiding-place wore the hide cuirass which distinguished these raiders. Probably they had continued upon their way south as soon as the rain abated sufficiently.

Our horses had vanished with equal completeness. The rain had washed out hoof-prints, and we had no means of tracking them. And I have often reflected upon the oddity of circumstance in twice throwing the spotted stallion in my path, only to separate us without warning after he had fulfilled his mission. I hope that Sunkawakan-kedeshka and his mares escaped the storm, and that he lived out his life, free and untamed, leading his herd upon the prairies. But I do not know. Destiny had its use for him. He served his dumb turn—and passed on.

Yet I like to think—and it may be I have imbibed somewhat of the red man's pagan philosophy from overmuch dwelling in his society—that in this shadowy afterworld of spirits, in which both red man and white profess belief, man shall find awaiting him the brave beasts that loved him on earth. There I may ride through the fields of asphodels, gripping between my knees the spirit-form of that which was Sunkawakan-kedeshka, feeling again the throb and strain of willing muscles, curbing the patient, tireless energy as I used to, watching the velvet ear that ever switched back for a kind word or drooped at a rebuke. But I dream—as old men must.

Consider now our plight. We who had been lately so harried by fate were once more exposed to its whimsies. But recently prisoners, next free but weaponless, we were today at liberty and armed, but the horses upon which we had relied to expedite our passage of the plains were gone. Also, we required food, for we had not eaten since noon of the day previous. Our nakedness I do not emphasize because Tawannears was an Indian and accustomed to it, and Peter and I had been habituated to it by years of exposure. For Kachina we had saved enough clothing to cover her, although she resented the distinction, and was as ready to bear her share of hardship as any of us.

Our food problem was solved temporarily by Peter, who insisted, and proved to our satisfaction that the flesh of the horses killed by the storm was still perfectly good. We ate it without avidity, tough, stringy meat, and sodden with moisture, but it sustained us for new efforts.

Having uncovered our cache of weapons, we examined them carefully and were able to equip ourselves anew, Peter carrying the two extra quivers of arrows at his own insistence. The two hide cuirasses, cumbrous garments of the thick neck-hide of the buffalo slowly dried by fire, we discarded as being too hot and confining and stinking of their former wearers. We likewise threw into the bed of the rivulet those knives and tomahawks for which we had no use, retaining four of each, of very fine Spanish steel, which the Tonkawas must have traded or ravaged from the Apache or other Southern tribes.

We were none of us disposed to continue eating horse-meat and we were all anxious to get as far as possible from a country which had been so singularly prolific in misfortune for us. So as soon as we had tested our bows and drunk deep of the brown stream that foamed along the gulch, we set out northeastward, aiming to work back to the river we had been following ever since we quit the eastern skirts of the Sky Mountains. We were governed in adopting this course by the same reasons which had influenced us before—we were afraid to venture away from water, we were more likely to find game near a river, and finally, it served as a guide to us in threading this pathless territory. To be sure, as we had proved already, there was more danger of meeting savages adjacent to a considerable river; but that was a risk we had to take. We were resolved to be doubly vigilant after our experiences with the Comanches and Tonkawas.

For three days we paralleled the river, pitching our course several miles to the south of it and approaching its banks only when we were driven to do so by need of water. During this time we fed on hares and a small animal which lived in multitudes in burrows under the prairies, besides a few fish which Tawannears caught in the river, employing a bone-hook he fashioned himself and a string of raw-hide from Kachina's shirt. We saw no other men or large animals, and the country gave every indication of having been swept bare by the storm.

On the fourth day we began to sight buffalo, and supped to satisfaction on the luscious hump of a young cow Tawannears shot, overjoyed at this welcome change in our diet. But the buffalo were the cause of our undoing. The small scattered herds that we first met were the usual advance-guards of an enormous army, grazing its way northward, and in order not to be delayed by its slow progress we crossed the river to the north bank and hurried east, intending to loop the front of the main herd. This we succeeded in doing, and then decided to remain on that side of the river, inasmuch as we knew we must be far south of the point at which we sought to strike the Mississippi, and ought really to be heading rather north of east.

'Twas this move which brought fresh trouble upon us, albeit conducing in the long run to our salvation. Had we remained on the south bank, we might have run the gantlet of enemies by other means, but this story must have been shaped differently—additional evidence of the immutable determination of Destiny to govern the issue of our lives. And had we not been blinded by our desire for haste and the isolation we had found in the track of the storm we should have realized that the approach of so large a herd would be a bait for the first tribe whose scouts marked it down. But we were blinded—by accident or Destiny, as you please.

As I have said, we pushed on north of the river, adhering to our former plan of keeping out of sight of its channel, and scouting carefully the ground ahead. We never gave a thought to what was behind us, and were paralyzed when Kachina, idly surveying the country from the summit of one of the long, easy swells which broke the monotony of the level plains, caught Tawannears by the arm and pointed westward, too surprized for words, fear and amazement struggling in her face.

IT WAS the middle of the forenoon, a warm, bright Summer day, yet not warm enough to bring up the dancing heat-haze which played strange tricks with vision in these vast open spaces. The next swell behind us was some two or three miles distant, and over its crest were galloping a string of tiny figures—horsemen with waving lances and glaring white shields. We were as distinct to them as they were to us, and the fact that they gave no special sign of exultation at seeing us was proof sufficient that they had been following us for some time. They were trailing us, scores of them, aye, hundreds, as they poured over the crest of the swell in a colorful, barbaric stream of martial vigor—and they could travel three feet to our one. Of course, they had picked up our trail in riding down to the river to meet the buffalo herd, and had followed it with the insatiable curiosity and rapacious instinct of their race.

So much we reasoned in the first second of discovery. We wasted no time in conversation, but dodged below the crest of the swell and ran at top-speed for the river as offering the nearest available cover under its banks. But the wily savages behind us divined our plan, and when, after we had traveled a mile, Tawannears reconnoitered their positions, it was to learn that they had detached a troop to ride diagonally up the slope of the swell and so cut us off from our goal. Two hundred of them were abreast of us at that moment less than a mile away.

Tawannears halted.

" 'Tis useless," he said bruskly. "We shall wind ourselves to no purpose. All that is left for us is to sell our lives dearly."

He turned his face skyward and appealed to his gods as a warrior and an equal.

"O Hawenneyu," he exclaimed, "and you, too, of the Honochenokeh, have you permitted Tawannears to escape all these perils, to obtain his Lost Soul, and abandoned him at the end to Hanegoategeh? See, Tawannears calls upon you for aid. And upon you of the Deohako, Three Sisters of Sustenance, Our Supporters! Tawannears calls upon you by right.

'Will you desert him when he has toiled and suffered so? Will you desert his white brothers who have been loyal through dangers no men ever dared before? Will you desert the Lost Soul who has been true to him in death, who returns with him from the land beyond the sunset, she who has traversed the halls of Haniskaonogeh, the dwelling-place of Evil, she who has passed with us through the lodge of Gaoh, lord of the winds, she who has defied Hanegoategeh?

"O Tharon the Sky-holder, Tawannears calls upon you to uphold him! But if death must come, then, oh, Hawenneyu, let Tawannears and his Lost Soul die together! Let the white brothers go with us to the halls of the Honochenokeh! Let us take with us the spirits of many warriors! Grant us a good death, O Hawenneyu!"

I am a Christian, but I thrilled to that prayer, and I called out—

"*Yo-hay!*" which is to say, "I approve!" after the manner of the People of the Long House.

Kachina notched an arrow, and loosed it into the air.

"Whatever the gods say, we fight!" she said. "We fight where the arrow falls."

It quivered into the sod a hundred yards in front of us just under the crest of the swell.

"*Ja*, dot's as goodt a place as any," Peter agreed equably. "Andt now we fight, eh?"

We trotted up to the arrow and clustered around it as the flanking party of the attackers galloped over the crest between us and the river. They whooped their delight upon seeing they had headed us, and a warrior commenced to ride his pony in furious circles to signal the main body they had us at bay, whilst the rest raced back to engage us. In five minutes they had strung a ring and were drawing in closer and closer toward bowshot distance.

Of all the tribes we had seen these men were the handsomest and most imposing. Tall, broad-shouldered, their bronze bodies shining with grease, they sat their pad-saddles, stirrupless, as though they were part of the horses under them. Their heads were shaven, except for a narrow ridge from forehead to scalplock, which was stiffened with paint and grease until it stood erect in semblance of a horn. Their faces were fierce, but intelligent. They proved their reckless valor by the way they overwhelmed us.

As bowmen they had no rivals. We opened upon them as soon as we thought we had a faint chance of driving a shaft or two home; but they, clinging to their horses shooting sometimes from the opposite sides or even from under their bellies, encumbered, too, with lance and shield, were able to send in shaft for shaft, which we avoided only by rapidly shifting our ground. We saw at once that in an arrow-duel we stood no chance, and as they did not seem anxious to force conclusions immediately, at Tawannears' suggestion we suspended our fire. They promptly desisted from their attack, their restless circle hovering round and round us, ready to smother any attempt at escape.

"Why do they wait?" cried Kachina. "They surely do not fear us!"

"Not they!" retorted Tawannears. "These people are great warriors."

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Tawannears never saw them before, brother."

"Here comes der chief," spoke up Peter.

With hundreds of deep voices chanting rhythmically, a mighty cavalcade came slowly over the summit of the swell, rank on rank of horsemen, the sunlight glinting on the white or painted surfaces of their shields, a forest of feathered lances standing above the horn-like headdresses. Leading them all was a warrior taller than the tallest, his chest arched like a demi-cask, the muscles playing on his huge shoulders as he controlled his mettlesome white horse. His face was as gravely handsome as Tawannears'; with a high forehead and a jutting, beaked nose; but his eyes were the fierce, watchful eyes of a savage, and his mouth was a cruel, thin line.

"A t'ousandt men!" gasped Peter.

The warriors in the circle around us reined in their horses, tossed their lances aloft and joined their voices in the booming chant of their brethern. Two of them quirted out of the line and raced up to the chief on the white horse to report. We could see their animated gestures, the frequency with which they pointed at us. The chief raised his hand, the chant was stilled, and he rode through the circle, attended by the two messengers, or sub-chiefs, and halted within hail of us.

Tawannears strode forward to meet him, and I marveled at the assurance the Seneca conveyed in his attitude. It was as if he were backed by the whole force of the Keepers of the Western Door.

"Who are you?" he demanded in the tone of one who holds power, speaking in the same mingled dialect of Comanche and Dakota he had used with the Tonkawas.

The chief on the white horse was manifestly amazed at Tawannears' assurance, but he replied quietly in the same tongue:

"They say I am Awa, war-chief of the Chahiksichahiks[1]. Who are you who walk on the ground with white men?"

"They call me Tawannears, warden of the Western Door of the Long House, war-chief of the Hodenosaunee," Tawannears shot back.

"Tawannears is many moons' journey from his teepee," rejoined Awa. "He did not come to our village and ask permission to cross our country."

"Why should a chief of the Long House ask permission to go on the Great Spirit's business?" returned Tawannears. "We have done your people no harm."

"If that is so," said the chief on the white horse, "render up to my people the maiden who is with you, and you may go free."

"Why?" asked Tawannears, bewildered.

"Every Summer Tirawa, the Old One in the Sky, sends my people a maid for a sacrifice. They say the maid with you comes to die on the scaffold under the morning star."

"They say lies," answered Tawannears with passion. "You shall not have her alive. She is holy."

Awa's reply was a gesture with his hand and a shouted order in his own language. A hundred warriors slipped from their horses in the first rank of the array outside the circle, dropped lances, shields and bows and ran toward us.

Tawannears, his face a mask of fury, ripped an arrow from his quiver and drove it at Awa's chest; but the chief on the white horse calmly interposed his shield and stopped it neatly, and the charge of warriors on foot compelled the Seneca to run back to us. We, who had understood practically nothing of the dialogue which had passed, were uncertain what the situation meant. Tawannears, himself, was at a loss.

"Fight," he shouted hoarsely. "We must not be captured."

We loosed arrows as rapidly as we could draw from quivers and notch them. 'Twas impossible to miss at that pointblank range, and we killed a dozen men before they came to hand-grips. Then we used knife and hatchet, Kachina as remorselessly as the rest of us, our assailants, evidently under Awa's orders, scrupulously refraining from drawing a weapon, lest they harm the girl who was destined for the sacrifice.

Back to back, striving to protect Kachina, we fought like wolves in famine-time, our arms aching from slaughter, but the Pawnee would not give in. They dived betwixt the legs of their comrades who were grappling barehanded against our knives, and so pulled us down. Peter was last to go, a dozen men clinging to his limbs. Kachina, biting at her captors, was led struggling from the heap of bodies. We others were jerked to our feet, arms pinioned and dragged after her.

The Pawnee horsemen crowded around us and the men we had killed. The chief on the white horse stared with satisfaction at Kachina's lithe body, hardly covered by the rags of her garments, and grinned amusement when she spat at him, trying to plant her teeth in the arm of one of the men who restrained her. He turned from her to the panting, bleeding warriors who held us, and to the pile of dead around the arrow Kachina had shot into the air. It stood there yet, hub of an ill-omened wheel of corpses, its feathers ruffling in the breeze. It seemed to fascinate him. His grin became a frown.

"You have made me pay a price for the girl," he said to Tawannears. "That is well. The Pawnee are not afraid to pay what Tirawa asks. But you shall pay now a price to me."

He drew his own bow from its case, and selected a shaft from the quiver at his side, notched it and aimed it at my chest.

"Awa will shoot you, one by one," he announced. "Afterward your hearts shall be cut out, and we will make strong medicine with them. This white man shall die first."

I had no more than time to smile at Tawannears and Peter when he pulled the bowstring taut and loosed. I had braced myself for the shock, knowing the shaft at that range must go clean through me. And certes, the blow was all that I had expected. I staggered before it. Had it not been for the warriors who held my arms I must have fallen backward.

Involuntarily I had shut my eyes. I opened them again, expecting to be in another world, marveling that the pain of an arrow in my vitals was no worse than a smart rap upon the chest. Around me I heard a gusty sigh, the sound made by many people expelling their breath. I looked down, wondering if I could still see myself, if the blood would be spurting or trickling.

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[1] Men-of-men, the real name of the Pawnee, the latter name, meaning Horn-wearers, being their designation by other tribes.

But I could find no wound. There was no arrow, no mark, no blood. I felt the savage holding my left arm sag strangely and turned to him. His face was gray, his eyes glazing. The arrow which had struck me was projecting from his side, buried half-way to the head. He collapsed as I looked at him.

There was an audible gasp from the ranks of horsemen. I found Awa's face in the throng, and noted that it was almost as ashen as that of the dying man beside me. The chief held the bow stiffly in his left hand, right arm crooked as when he had loosed.

Tawannears laughed harshly.

"Strong medicine Awa has made!" he mocked. "He shot at my white brother an arm's-length away, and my brother turned the arrow against the great chief's warrior. Will Awa try again? Shall we make more medicine for him?"

Awa's arm was trembling as he returned the bow to its case.

"Your white brother has strong medicine," he admitted. "We will carry you all to our village, and our medicine-men shall try their magic upon you. Awa is a war-chief, not a maker of magic."

"We are both warriors and medicine-men!" Tawannears derided him mercilessly. "Shall we make trial of our medicine again?"

Awa abruptly reined his horse about, shouted an order and clattered off at the head of his cavalcade. Our guards first bound our arms loosely behind us, then tied strips of rawhide betwixt us and themselves, one on either side, and mounted us upon ponies. Thus each of us was tied to a pair of the Pawnee.

I called to Tawannears as he was led by me.

"What happened? My eyes were shut. I——"

"Your orenda is powerful, brother," he replied seriously. "It has spread its hand over our heads. Hawenneyu has used it to answer the prayer of Tawannears."

I was no less puzzled by this, but Peter cackled shrilly.

"Look adt your chest," he squeaked.

I bent my head. My chest was bare, unscarred. All it showed was the little deerskin pouch Guanaea had hung around my neck by a thong the day we left Deonundagaa, which had stayed by me through all our adventures. No Indian would have dreamed of taking it from me, for it contained my medicine, and the possibilities for evil inherent in interference with another man's medicine were boundless.

I regarded the pouch idly, my mind occupied with the thought that it was practically the only possession with which I had started upon our journey that was still with me—and I was startled to see a slit in its front. I looked at it more closely. Yes, there was a slit, such a slit as an arrow-head might make.

What had Tawannears said?

"Your orenda is powerful, brother."

And what had Guanaea said in hanging it there?

"That will protect you against all evils! A most powerful orenda! I had it made by Hineogetah, the medicine-man."

But that was ridiculous, I told myself! I had worn it to please Guanaea, and because her forethought had touched me. But was that a reason for subscribing to gross superstition? This fetched me around to my starting-point. The fact remained that the bag had stopped an arrow. How? My mind cast back for further aid, and memory came to my rescue.

What had it contained?

"The fangs of a bull rattlesnake. That is the spirit to resist evil. The eye-tooth of a wolf. That is the spirit to resist courage."

The eye-tooth of a wolf! That had done it. I wiggled my chest-muscles and felt the protuberance under the draw-string—and beneath it a certain soreness. The arrow had driven head-on into the tooth and been diverted sidewise into the warrior on my left. So mysterious as this are the wonders of Providence—or Destiny—or an Iroquois medicine-man!

CHAPTER XXIV

A PROPHET IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

DURING the afternoon of the fifth day of hard riding our guards fetched us from the midst of the column to a position next to Awa. The chief had recovered somewhat from his bedazed wonder—no doubt he had half-expected me to continue working miracles—and regarded us with saturnine satisfaction.

'Soon we shall enter the villages of our people," he announced, swinging his arm toward the prairie in front of us. "The medicine-men of the Chahiksichahiks then will make trial of the white man's medicine—and we will build a scaffold for the red maiden to lie upon when she weds the morning star."

"That is to be seen," returned Tawannears with undisturbed arrogance. "A voice has whispered in my ear that the Great Spirit has other plans. It says there will be misfortune for the Horn-wearers if the red maiden is sacrificed."

Awa scowled.

"We shall see," he agreed.

Feathered lances bobbing overhead, our great escort of savage horsemen cantered out of a shallow gulley onto the bank of a sizable river. A mile or so east and well back from high-water mark began a series of low, hump-backed mounds, which I took to be natural features of the terrane. But as we came nearer people popped out of them, and we perceived that they were houses, partly dug out of the ground and roofed and walled with sods, commodious dwellings, larger than the largest of teepees and invariably round in shape.

The people who met us were old men and women, with an occasional young child of toddling age or under. Awa barked a question to the first group, and one of the old men quavered an answer, gesturing down-river, where the sod-covered earth-houses reached as far as we could see. With a nod of acknowledgment, the chief heeled his horse to a gallop, and we rode on at speed along a rough trail that led betwixt houses and river-bank. Beyond the houses were simple gardens, and in the rear of these horses grazed. Dogs ran out of many houses and barked at us. But nowhere did we see a man or woman in the prime of life or a half-grown child.

The mystery of the deserted village—or, rather, succession of villages—was settled after we had ridden another three miles, when an enormous crowd of savages appeared in an open space in the center of the largest collection of earth-houses. There must have been ten or twelve thousand people clustered together, men, women and children, all deeply interested in some proceeding which we could not see at first. But the thudding of the hoofs of Awa's band attracted their attention, and they opened their ranks for us, so that our column passed through the outskirts of the throng and came to a halt on the verge of a circle of hard-trodden clay, perhaps a hundred feet across.

In the center of this space stood a fire-charred stump of wood, and lashed to it with strips of green hide was the black-garbed figure of a man whose dead-white face brought a gasp of astonishment from my lips. 'Twas Black Robe, Père Hyacinthe, the Jesuit, whom we had last seen the day he insisted upon leaving us on the western bank of the Mississippi, striding alone into the unknown wastes ahead!

His ankles were hobbled loosely and bound to the base of the stump. His hands, knotted behind his back, were likewise fastened to it. He could move a foot or so in either direction, and six feet away from him a party of warriors were building a pile of light-wood, which had reached the height of his knees when our arrival distracted them from their labors.

His *soutane* was the same rusty, torn garment he had worn three years before. His sandals were patched and worn. His gaunt figure testified, as always, to the ceaseless toil and deprivation to which he subjected himself. His emaciated features shone with the radiation of some inward light, and his face, with eyes closed, was upturned in prayer. Certes, no man could have been in worse case, yet his racked body contrived to express an ecstasy of joy beyond all words. Indeed, his utter lack of fear, the otherworldliness of his devotion, had already sapped the savage energy of his would-be tormentors. They were not used to seeing a man face the prospect of torture without boasting or exultation, with no more than the calm disdain of a courage higher than any emotion they knew.

I was not alone in my surprize. Tawannears clicked his tongue. Peter muttered—

"Der Jesuit!"

Kachina remarked with interest—

"Another white man!"

And Awa was as dumfounded as ourselves. He shouted a question, and a knot of gorgeously-decorated chiefs and medicine-men detached themselves from the front rank of the onlookers and clustered about his horse, pointing at us, their eyes fairly popping from their heads. Evidently, they, too, were surprized—and that was not strange, for 'twas seldom these wild horsemen of the plains saw three white men at once, or so I reasoned.

"The Great Spirit's ways are difficult to follow," commented Tawannears. "He has carried us again along Black Robe's trail."

"Awa will see in his capture an excuse for daring to disregard my orenda," I said pessimistically.

"*Nein, nein,*" squeaked Corlaer. "All is not well wit' der Pawnee. See how dey boggle andt chaw togedder."

'Twas so. Awa's face was a mingling of baffled rage, hysterical superstition and credulous awe. His gaze shifted rapidly from us to the figure of Black Robe, eyes still closed, lips murmuring in silent prayer. The medicine-men and chiefs who had swarmed up to the war-chief were staring at us with expressions akin to fear. Awa suddenly spat out an ejaculation, and pushed his horse beside us. We four were now the focal object of the crowd's attention.

"Whence did you say you have come?" he demanded of Tawannears in the polyglot trade dialect.

"From beyond the setting sun," Tawannears replied gravely. "I have been to the land of Lost Souls, and there I found this maiden who loved me once before on earth and is come back with me to reenter my lodge."

"But this Taivo, this white man?" Awa leveled his finger at me.

"He, too, has come with me from the land beyond the sunset."

Awa spoke rapidly in the Pawnee tongue, and one of the medicine-men, a brightly-painted, elderly man with wrinkled face, took up the conversation in Comanche.

"It was foretold by the white man at the stake that you would come," he began.

"That is likely," admitted Tawannears, unperturbed.

"He told us," continued the medicine-man, with a fearful look over his shoulder at that black figure bound to the tree-stump, "that he served a God who would come to us from the sky, and when we asked him if he meant Tirawa, the Old One in the Skies, he said no. But when we asked if this new God would come from the sunset he said it might be, that He would come in a great blaze of glory, with power to bend all to His will. Is this Taivo at your side the God of whom the first white stranger spoke?"

Tawannears turned and translated swiftly the gist of this to me.

"Say that we come to herald the coming of that God," I directed him. "Even as the white man at the stake came to tell the Chahiksichahiks that we should come to them from the setting sun."

The medicine-man and his fellows, even the fierce Awa, heard this announcement with growing awe.

"For a sign," added Tawannears, "the Taivo, who permits me to call him brother, and who is attended by the great white warrior who has the strength of many buffalo showed Awa, the war-chief, how he could turn aside arrows and direct them against his enemies. Let Awa speak for me!"

The war-chief admitted the fact, no longer surly, but agitated by a sense of the prestige attaching to him as a principal participant in a miracle transcending any like event his people had ever known.

"But what of the maiden?" he urged practically. "Surely, Tirawa directed you to bring her here for the sacrifice?"

"The maiden is holy," replied Tawannears. "She has paid the price of life here on earth. She comes, as has been said, from the land of Lost Souls. Would Tirawa ask for the sacrifice of one who had descended from his own lodge?"

The medicine-man interjected fierce dissent, and Awa's arguments were stilled.

"Make them release Black Robe," I suggested as Tawannears repeated to me what had been said.

A hush, as complete as the quietness of universal death, had descended upon these thousands of savages, whose glances turned from us, bound and helpless as we were, to the equally straitened figure of the Jesuit against the torture-stake.

"No," retorted the Seneca with a hint of humor, "but first, brother, we must make them release us."

He fastened his eyes upon Awa.

"For many sleeps we have endured the treatment Awa's ignorance led him to impose upon us," he declared. "We have been loath to slay any more of his people. We came hither to serve the Chahiksichahiks, to assure them of Tirawa's favor. But the time is arrived when we must know if we are to receive the respect due to Tirawa's messengers. Shall we burst our bonds—and in doing so slay this multitude—or will you do us honor?"

The medicine-man leaped forward, and slashed off our bonds. There were beads of perspiration on his brow. Awa, magnificent savage that he was, looked away from us, but I saw that his sinewy hands were shaking as they clutched his horse's bridle.

"It is well," said Tawannears. "Give my white brother, the Messenger, the knife, and he will free the Fore-goer, who has stood quietly at the torture-stake, holding back the wrath of Tirawa by the pleas that came from his lips."

The medicine-man offered me the knife.

"But must a messenger of Tirawa have a knife to cut hide thongs?" he inquired, curious as a child.

"No," answered Tawannears, "but if the power of Tirawa is used, the power of the thunder and the lightning which shakes the world, who shall say what harm may come? The Chahiksichahiks have been fools. Let them be satisfied with what has happened. If they are wise they will possess the favor of Tirawa. If they continue to be foolish Tirawa will wipe them out here on this spot!"

He raised his arm in a menacing gesture, and chiefs and medicine-men cowered before him.

"No, no," pleaded the medicine-man. "We have seen enough. Release the Black One with the thin face. We did not understand him. He spoke to us after the manner of the Comanche and the Dakota, telling us, as we thought, that our gods were not, that we must worship this one he spoke of. We did not understand him, that was all. We were ignorant, but we meant no harm."

Tawannears shrugged his shoulders.

"That is to be decided," he said. "The Taivo will consult with Black Robe, and afterwards will speak through me. It is for him to decide."

I STRODE into the empty circle of people and walked slowly, so as not to seem undignified, up to the stake, stepping across the material for the fire which would now be roasting the priest had it not been for our unexpected arrival, and the conjunction of circumstances it had set in train. The fire-makers had gone. There was nobody inside the circle except Black Robe and myself, and he stood yet, with his eyes shut, a trickle of Latin pattering from his lips.

For a moment I was shocked by the traces of suffering in that haggard face, the skin tight-drawn over the prominent bones, the cavernous eye-holes so shadowed, the deep lines graven in the pallid cheeks. I seemed to see in retrospect the labors he must have achieved in the years since we had parted. Who could imagine how far he had wandered, the hardships and sufferings he had supported without the assistance of a single comforter of his own color? And this thought enabled me to envision as never before the ardent flame that was the driving force of his life, the devotion to a creed which ignored every other consideration save that of the service to which he had dedicated himself. I warmed to him in that moment, forgetting ancient animus, brushing aside the barrier of hostile race and religion.

"Père Hyacinthe!" I said softly in French.

He did not open his eyes, but his lips ceased the Latin exhortations.

"I dream!" he exclaimed to himself, in that humble tone I had observed on a previous occasion when he forgot himself and his stern rôle and lapsed into some gentler habitude of the past.

"Was that Gaston's voice? So, I remember, he crept upon me as I read in the garden at Morbouil! Dear olden days! Their memory comes so seldom. So little time left for the work to be done. Ah, Jesus, the task is heavy—heavy——"

He opened his eyes, peered into mine.

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes, 'tis I, Father—Henry Ormerod!"

"My enemy! France's enemy!"

"Not your enemy! And never France's, unless she wills it. I am come here to save you."

"How may that be?" he asked dumbly. "Are you alone amongst these savages?"

"Alone with my friends whom you know—and one woman."

"Then you can not help me," he answered decisively. "You had best leave me, if you can. These people are the most independent of all the tribes. They fear naught save their own superstitions. And heretic though you be, I can not wish you the death they plan for me."

"Yet you have not been moved by pity for me in the same case in former years," I said curiously.

He sighed.

"The truth is hard to see. I do not know. I have thought— But I do not know."

I cut the lashings of his arms, stooped and freed his legs. Not a soul spoke. Amazement dawned in his face that was somehow more placid than I remembered having seen it.

"You see!" I said. "They gave me the knife to cut you free."

"Marvelous!" he murmured.

And he employed his first instant of freedom to reach down stiffly with his cramped arm and lift to his lips the crucifix which hung at his belt.

"How have you curbed them?" he asked—and he was yet governed by that mood of gentle humility, which was seldom of long continuance.

"I think, Father, it has been through God's mercy," I answered. "But judge for yourself."

And I repeated to him, briefly, what had transpired since Awa proudly led his warriors into the circle around the torture-stake. A frown clouded the Jesuit's eyes. His mouth formed a grim, hard line.

"What blasphemy is this?" he interrupted. "Man, would you mock the authority of heaven. You are no more messengers of the divine will than these savages themselves!"

"How can you be sure?" I asked.

"How can I——"

He paused abruptly, frowning in thought.

"Is it coincidence," I continued quickly, "that when you climbed the Mississippi bluff I would not let my companions kill you, as they desired—and for the matter of that, is it coincidence that once before the time of which I speak, I saved you from them, aye, and from the wrath of the Long House? Is it coincidence that we were the means of your passing the Mississippi, and that now we and you, alike in danger of death, are saved by the inter-linking facts of our separate captivities.

"Ponder it, Père Hyacinthe! Where does coincidence begin and Providence end? Are you so wise that you can say what Heaven intends? Can you afford to throw away the life that has been returned to you? Have you the right to sacrifice four other peoples' lives? How do you know that what has happened today was not for the purpose of giving you another opportunity to preach your creed?"

He hesitated, head bowed.

"Go!" I said, honestly stirred. "Say what you please! I could stop you, but I will not take the responsibility of interfering with another man's sense of honor. I will leave with you the lives of my comrades."

He looked at me, puzzled, uncertain.

"I do not know," he repeated. "It seems different. You are a heretic, yet—I do not know. God's wonders are—strange—I do not know——"

"Who does?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"I used to be sure," he said, more to himself than to me. "But—I do not know. I was reconciled to death. I had no fear of the torment. I hoped to move these people at the end. And now you say that they respect me, that I am free, I may do as I will."

"Yes."

"It is too much for me to decide, Monsieur Ormerod. Perhaps I grow weak. Well, we shall see. But I think it is as you say! I have been given a second opportunity to woo them for Christ. God's wonders—how strange! How impossible to comprehend! And you a heretic, the companion of a savage! It baffles me."

He paused suddenly.

"You spoke to me first?" he questioned. "There was—no other?"

"None."

"Strange!" he muttered to himself again. "Gaston—I thought I heard—the garden at Morbouil! Ah, *maman, maman!* So many, many years!"

CHAPTER XXV

HOMEWARD

TO MY surprize, Black Robe expressed a desire to accompany us on our continued journey east.

"I have said all that I have to say concerning what you have told these people about me," he said simply. "But I am sure I should lose favor in God's sight were I to continue my mission on the strength of the heathen superstitions you have aroused."

I pointed out to him that he would probably be exposed to additional dangers in our company after we had crossed the Mississippi.

"Say, instead, that you will not be exposed to so many dangers if I am with you, Monsieur Ormerod," he answered. "'Tis necessary for my soul's good, as I now realize, that I should return and seek the discipline of my superiors. I have wandered too long alone. My pride hath been unduly stirred. In my heart I have flouted the rules of my order. It is best that I should go to Quebec, and submit to the punishment my sins require."

"Sins? What sins?" I exclaimed.

"There are sins of the spirit as wicked as sins of the flesh," he returned enigmatically. "Whoso thinks himself worthy of martyrdom therein nourishes his own pride. But enough hath been said on this score. I will go with you."

"Why?" I asked. "'Tis not your wont to profess friendship for my people, Père Hyacinthe?"

His grim face creased in the rare smile that told of some hidden spring of kindliness, forgotten these many years.

"You are pertinacious—like all heretics. Go to! Is it forbidden that I should return good for good, as well as for evil?"

And no more could I extract from him. At intervals in the months that followed he would lapse into moods of dour fanaticism, but no matter how long they lasted the day would come when he would smile with childlike humility, and, silent always, contrive to invest himself with gentle friendliness. I do not pretend to understand the transformation of his character; but the fact remains that he was become a different man from the bigot who had accused us on the Ohio. He spoke to us only when occasion required; Kachina he ignored completely, much to her disgust. But he did his full share of the work, and his prestige sufficed to speed us on our way once the Mississippi was behind us.

We had many weary miles to go before we reached the Great River, however. Awa and his medicine-man and brother chiefs would have had us stay on in the Pawnee villages, and opposed our departure with as much ugliness as they dared exhibit to beings of semi-divine origin. But Tawannears placated them by explaining that the strong medicine I was going to present to the tribe could only wax to its full robust proportions after I had gone.

This medicine was prepared with many attendant ceremonies and considerable pomp under the Seneca's directions. Kachina sewed a bag of deerskin, and then, in the presence of all the Pawnee notables, I solemnly removed from my neck the bag which Guanaea had hung there—the arrow-slit having been repaired by Peter—and introduced its open mouth into the throat of the bag Kachina had made.

A suitable interval having elapsed, I removed my bag, rehung it about my neck, fastened the neck of the new bag and entrusted it—quite empty—to the chief medicine-man, with strict injunctions never to open it lest the medicine escape. The Pawnee were satisfied. They felt capable of whipping any confederacy of near-by tribes, and were convinced that they would never lack for buffalo-meat, horses or warriors. There was nothing they would not do for us. When we finally departed for the East Awa and five hundred warriors rode with us and compelled an Osage village to supply us with a canoe for use on the Mississippi.

We were many days' paddling below the mouth of the Ohio, with the current against us, both on the Father of Waters and after we had turned east into the first stream; and Indian Summer had begun when we reached the mouth of the Ouabache. Here we expected to part with Black Robe, but he surprized me again.

"You are yet many weeks' journey from your own country, Monsieur Ormerod," he said. "And if you continue by water you must paddle against the current all the way. Why do you not strike over-land direct?"

"Because your people and the tribes they control would certainly not approve of it, I answered with a laugh.

"Come with me to Vincennes," he offered. "I will secure you safe-conduct to Jagara."*

"Are you sure—" I began hesitantly.

"That I can do what I say?" he interrupted. "I have some authority in New France. You may rest confidence in my pledge. I, myself, will attend you so far as Jagara. 'Tis on my way to Montreal and Quebec."

I consulted with the others, anticipating Tawannears and Corlaer would be unwilling to trust him; but both assented promptly.

"Black Robe is no longer a hater of those who do not believe in his God," responded the Seneca to my query as to his changed attitude. "He has learned that we are honest in what we think. He has learned too, that love is the servant of truth."

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* Niagara.

"*Ja*," said Peter. "Andt he remembers der time he was a man before he was a bpriest."

"He is a nasty old ant," declared Kachina. "He flaps like a raven. Ugh! I hate him!"

We paddled up the Ouabache to Vincennes, undisturbed by the savages along the river. The French garrison at the trading-post eyed us with suspicion, but made no objection to our presence. On the trip overland to Le Detroit, the French post on the straits betwixt the Huron Lake and the Lake of the Eries, the priest guided us past the scowling scrutiny of tribe after tribe, to whom Tawannears' presence was a menacing reminder of their dreaded enemies, the People of the Long House. Savages, traders, habitants, trappers, soldiers of the Lilies, all bowed and stood aside at sight of that gaunt figure, the crippled hand upraised in blessing. Under the skirts of his threadbare robe he carried us through the heart of the new empire France was creating below the Lakes, saving us I know not how many months of dangerous, roundabout traveling. And from Le Detroit he escorted us to the fortress at Jagara, which the great French soldier-statesman of the wilderness, Joncaire, had built to form a bulwark against the Iroquois.

'Twas here we said good-by, in the woods on the edge of the glacis, sloping up to the stone walls of the fort. In the distance we heard the subdued roar of the mighty falls. On the walls of the fort stood the white-coated sentinels of France. At our feet commenced a tenuous trail, the Northern approach to the Western Door of the Long House.

Black Robe gave Tawannears the Iroquois salute of parting. He pressed Peter's hand. On Kachina he bestowed his blessing.

"There is a place on Christ's bosom for you, my daughter," he said in the Seneca dialect, which she had mastered.

She scowled back at him in a way that must have compelled a man with a sense of humor to laugh.

"We are not Christians," Tawannears stated proudly. "The gods of our people are good enough for us. Have they not reunited us in the face of death—and beyond?"

The priest sighed and drew me to one side.

"Do you ever pray, Monsieur Ormerod?" he asked.

"I have done so."

"Forget not one Louis Joseph Marie de Kerguezac. He is dead, Monsieur, although he lives. I pray you, forget him not. He needs your prayers, aye, heretic or not, he needs them! So, too, I fear doth one Hyacinthe, of the Order of Jesus, a hard man, who hath wreaked harm under cover of saintliness. Ah, God, how little do we know what we do!"

"Hard you have been in times past, Father," I replied, "but I bear testimony you have redeemed yourself in my eyes—albeit I hold I, nor any other man, may judge you after what you have suffered for your faith."

He considered this, crucifix in hand.

"Who can say?" he said at length. "I have lived over-much self-centered. Never trust yourself too far, Monsieur Ormerod. Man is—man! You, too, have suffered. Therefore you will know that suffering is worth while—so long as you do not seek satisfaction in it. You, Monsieur, went forth to forget a woman—near four years ago, was it not? Have you—forgotten?"

'Twas my turn to think.

"Not forgotten," I decided, stirred, but not resentful. "Yet the pain is dead. Say, rather, reconciled to loss."

His face was contorted with agony.

"Four years, and reconciled! Monsieur Ormerod, I have striven to forget for twenty years, and the pain still burns my soul! I chose the wrong way, the wrong way!"

He turned and stumbled from the forest, hands out-thrust before him, as he walked blindly toward the fort.

"The wrong way! The wrong way!"

They were the last words I heard him speak. Months later, in New York, the news came from Quebec that the famous Père Hyacinthe, called far and wide the Apostle to the Savages, was serving a disciplinary sentence as scullery servant in the headquarters of the Order of Jesus.

ON THE afternoon of the second day after leaving Jagara we were challenged by an out-flung party of Seneca Wolves, Watchers of the Door, who made the forest aisles ring with their whoops of joy when they recognized Tawannears, clamoring for the story of our wanderings. But at his first question joy was turned to sadness, for they gave us the sorry tidings that Donehogaweh, the Guardian of the Door, lay at the point of death from a gangrened wound that had festered about the barbed head of a Miami arrow, shot into his shoulder during his last punitive raid.

We forgot all else in our haste to reach Deonundagaa in time to see the Royaneh before his end; and there remained a lingering splash of color in the Western sky as we trotted out of the forest, crossed the gardens and entered the village streets lined by the long *ganasotes* and thronged with mourning people. They exclaimed with amazement at sight of Corlaer's vast bulk and Tawannears' familiar figure. An irregular column formed at our heels, warriors who strove for a word with members of our escort, gossiping women and children who babbled and shrieked amongst themselves.

So we came to the open space by the council lodge. Beside its entrance Donehogaweh lay on a pallet of skins, in compliance with his request to pass in the outer air. A group of Royanehs and chiefs sat about him, sternly watching, their sympathy unspoken, their faces emotionless. Guanaea hovered over him, equally silent, but unable to restrain the sorrow that was revealed in her eyes and trembling lips. 'Twas her cry of astonishment gave him the first intimation of our coming. He turned his great head, with its gray-streaked scalplock, and his fever-bright eyes dwelt upon us almost unbelievingly.

"Is it indeed you, O my sister's son?" he asked weakly. "Do I see with you Otetiani, the white son of my old age, and Corlaer of the fat belly? Or do evil dreams taunt me again?"

"We are here, O my uncle," answered Tawannears kneeling by the pallet and drawing Kachina down beside him.

"And who is the maiden with you?"

"She is your daughter."

"My daughter? Not——"

Guanaea emitted a little shriek and ran closer.

"Gahano?" questioned the dying Royaneh.

The group of chiefs bent forward, startled out of their stoical self-control. Guanaea knelt beside Tawannears and Kachina, her eyes boring into the girl's face.

"Yes, she is Gahano," said Tawannears. "Tawannears and his white brothers have been to the land of Lost Souls, which is beyond the sunset. They have passed the barriers of Haniskaonogeh. They have ventured upon the altar of Hawenneyu. They have crossed the mountains at the end of the world, where all is ice and snow. They have traversed Dayedadogowar, the great home of the winds. And in the land of Lost Souls they had speech with Ataentsic and Jouskeha, as is told in the traditions of our people, and the Lost Soul of Gahano came from a pumpkin shell and danced, and we took her and fled to our own country."

"She is different from the Gahano I bore," protested Guanaea, breaking the dead silence that ensued, whilst the blazing eyes of the old Royaneh probed the faces of the pair beside him.

Kachina peered sidewise at her a thought mutinously, but held her peace, failing any sign from Tawannears.

Donehogaweh feebly nodded his head.

"She would look different," he announced. "Who would not look different after death? Shall I look the same an hour hence? Yes, she is different—and yet like the Gahano who was. And in truth did you find the land of Lost Souls, Tawannears?"

'Twas Corlaer who answered, speaking with a resonant ease that so oddly became him when using an Indian dialect instead of English.

"It was all exactly as foretold in the legends," he said. "This maiden had come there direct from the custody of the Great Spirit. She was delivered in charge of him who was Jouskeha. Ataentsic was not willing to give her up, but Jouskeha aided us and we took her by force, the Great Spirit aiding us."

That was a long speech for the Dutchman. I felt myself called upon to support him.

"If that was not the land of Lost Souls," I declared, "then the legends of the Hodenosaunee are a mockery."

"*Yo-hay!*" cried Donehogaweh, and he heaved himself to his haunches. "Welcome back to my lodge, Gahano, although you go from it to——"

He choked and fell dead.

"Wo! Wo!" wept Guanaea. "The pinetree is fallen! The light is clouded. In my lodge now all is darkness and despair!"

Tawannears caught her hand.

"But see, you who are almost my mother," he said. "I have brought back to you the daughter who was lost to you. We will be son and daughter to you in your loneliness."

Guanaea would not be comforted.

"Who am I to scorn the generosity of Hawenneyu?" she cried. "Who am I to doubt the deeds of great warriors? I am only a woman, only a mother whose offspring left her, only a widow whose man went ahead of her into the land of shadows. Yet I can not take this new Gahano to my breast. She is not to me as the child I suckled or the maiden whose waywardness I curbed. Nay, I can only mourn. I am an old woman. I have out-lived my time! I will cover my face and sit by the ashes of the fire and weep!"

She threw her robe around her head and tottered away to the lodge she had shared with Donehogaweh, attended by the old women of her clan.

Ganeodiyo, senior Royaneh of the Senecas, stooped over and closed the eyes of his dead colleague, then rose.

"Tawannears has spent many moons upon a twisting trail," he said. "He and his white brothers have made us proud of them. They have done what no other warriors have done. There was a stain upon the women of their clan, but they have wiped it off. It is well! Our eyes are dazzled by the splendor of their achievement. Our ears do not hear distinctly, for the cries of the enemies they vanquished. The face of the maiden they have recovered seems strange to us, but we shall grow accustomed to her again. Her feet will seek out the ways she knew of old. All will be as it was before. She will seem as though she had never departed.

"*Na-ho!*"

"PETER," I said, when we were alone together in the guest-chamber of the *ganasote* of the bachelors of the Wolf Clan, "have we done well to lie?"

He regarded me with twinkling eyes.

"Lie?"

"Yes, lie," I insisted. "Have we not lent our countenance to an essential falsehood?"

He meditated.

"*Ja*, we liedt—maype," he admitted finally. "Dot is, we saidt dot what Tawannears saidt was so—andt dot's no lie."

"How?"

"You pelief dot Tawannears peliefs what he says?"

"Yes."

"He wouldt die if he t'ought idt was not true." Corlaer spoke with extraordinary vehemence for him. "You nefer knew a man who worshiped der trut' more than Tawannears. What he says he saw andt didt is true—isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Andt what you don't pelief is true is dot 'Lost Souls' pusiness, eh?"

"Yes."

"But Tawannears peliefs idt is true—don't he?"

"Yes, yes, Peter. I've already said so."

"What is a lie, then, eh? You t'ink der Lost Souls is—funny-pusiness. Tawannears t'inks idt is gospel. Now, who is lying—you or Tawannears?"

"But——"

"*Nein, nein!* Not so quick. Tawannears knew what he was looking for, eh? Andt you didt not. Why shouldt you say dot Tawannears is lying any more than you? You saw what Tawannears saidt dot you wouldt see. He was right in dot, eh?"

"Yes, but——"

"So idt is," continued Peter inexorably. "Tawannears peliefs what he saidt. You do not. If anybody lies, you lie. Idt is your lie, not Tawannears'. But how can you be sure Tawannears is wrong?"

"The girl Kachina—Guanaea——"

"Kachina looks like Gahano. Andt it is like Donehogaweh saidt—if she has peen deadt, how can she look der same? *Nein!*"

"But Guanaea!" I insisted.

"She is a woman, andt women are funny beoble. She nefer liked Gahano pefore."

"And what do you think, yourself, Peter?"

"I pelief what Tawannears says. Idt is goodt for him to belief idt. Idt hurts nopody, eh? So I pelief. *Ja*, dot's goodt!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE END OF THE TRAIL

THE forest trees and the brown grass stubble of the meadow beneath their skeleton boughs were powdered lightly with snow, except where a tiny fire burned, its smoke floating upward into the overhanging tree-tops. On the far side of the field, backed by the roofs of the village, was massed the population of Deonundagaa, men, women and children. Beside the fire the robes of the seven surviving Royanehs of the Senecas, headed by Ganeodiyo, each with his assistant behind him, made a splash of vivid color.

Dimly through the bare foliage I glimpsed the long file of the Royanehs of the other four nations—the Mohawks, Dagoeoga, the Shield People; the Onondagas, Hodesannogeta, the Name-Bearers; the Oneidas, Neardeondargowar, Great Tree People; the Cayugas, Sonushogwatowar, Great Pipe People. The Tuscaroras, sixth nation in the great league, had no representation in the Hoyarnagowar, because the Founders had created only so many names, or seats, and no Iroquois would have thought of altering the framework they built; but a group of Tuscarora chieftains followed in the train of the Royanehs, mute witnesses by right to what should transpire.

I have seen many ceremonies in my day. I have watched the Pope celebrate mass in St. Peter's. I have attended at the mummery of the French Court, with the splendor of Versailles and the Louvre for background. But I have never seen aught more imposing than the rites of the Condoling Council of the Iroquois, the ceremonies by which at one and the same time they express their appreciation of a great man who has died and install his successor, beginning with the ceremony Deyughnyonkwarakta, "At the Wood's Edge."

Slowly, at a sign from Hoyowenato, the Keeper of the Wampum, the long file of the Royanehs paced out from the forest and formed in a half-circle opposite the little group of Seneca Royanehs, with the fire betwixt them. Then Ganeodiyo, spokesman for the Senecas, stepped forward with arms outflung in welcome to the visitors. His trained orator's voice rolled in the measured cadences of the stately ritual, opening with the sentence—

"*Onenh weghniserade wakatyerenkowa desawennawenrate ne kenteyurhoton!*" (Now, today, I have been greatly startled by your voices coming through the forest to this opening.)

And proceeding in the set phrases of the greeting:

"You have come with troubled minds through all obstacles. You kept seeing the places where they met on whom we depended, my offspring. How then can your mind be at ease? You kept seeing the footmarks of our forefathers; and all but perceptible is the smoke where they used to smoke the pipe together. Can, then, your mind be at ease when you are weeping on your way?

"Great thanks, therefore, that you have safely arrived. Now let us smoke the pipe together. Because all around are hostile agencies, which are each thinking—'I will frustrate their purpose.' Here thorny ways, and here falling trees, and here wild beasts lying in ambush. Either by these you might have perished, my offspring, or here by floods you might have been destroyed, my offspring, or by the uplifted hatchet in the dark outside the house. Every day these are wasting us; or deadly invisible disease might have destroyed you, my offspring."

The echoing voice went on, flexing the emotions of the words like a great organ. The orator recited the rules the forefathers had laid down. He repeated the traditional list of the villages of the three original clans, the Wolf, the Tortoise and the Bear. Then the fire was put out, and one by one the Royanehs marched from the meadow to the council house of the village, where a new fire was kindled by Ganeodiyo, and they sat in a wide circle on robes placed for them by their assistants.

Hoyowennato produced the pipe of ceremony from its case; the mystically-carven soapstone bowl was filled with tobacco and he handed it to Ganeodiyo, who lighted it with a coal from the council fire, blew the required puffs to the four quarters and to the earth and the sky and passed it on to Tododaho, senior of all the Royanehs, he who sits beside the ancient undying council fire of the League, which has burned for ages and ages at Onondaga. The pipe went the rounds of the circle and was returned to Hoyowennato, who replaced it in its case.

Tododaho rose.

"My offspring, now this day we are met together," he intoned. "The Great Spirit has appointed this day. We are met together on account of the solemn event which has befallen you. Now into the earth he has been conveyed to whom we have been wont to look. Therefore in tears we have smoked together.

"Now, then, we say, we wipe away the tears, so that in peace you may look about you.

"And further, we suppose there is an obstruction in your ears. Now, then, we remove the obstruction carefully from your hearing, so that we trust you will easily hear the words spoken.

"And also we imagine there is an obstruction in your throat. Now, therefore, we say, we remove the obstruction, so that you may speak freely in our mutual greetings.

"Now again another thing, my offspring. I have spoken of the solemn event which has befallen you. Every day you are losing your great men. They are being borne into the earth; so that in the midst of blood you are sitting.

"Now, therefore, we say, we wash off the blood-marks from your seat, so that it may be for a time that happily the place will be clean where you are seated.

"And now, that our hearts may be prepared for the instructions of our forefathers and the memory of their greatness, we sing the hymn 'Yondonghs Aihaigh'."

Almost a hundred voices boomed out the rhythmic lines:

"I come again to greet and thank the League;
I come again to greet and thank the kindred;
I come again to greet and thank the warriors;
I come again to greet and thank the women.
My forefathers—what they established—
My forefathers—hearken to them!"

And after the song was ended, Tododaho walked up and down the council house, crying out:

"Hail, my grandsires! Now hearken while your grandchildren cry mournfully to you—because the Great League which you established has grown old.

"Even now, oh, my grandsires, that has become old which you established—the Great League! You have it as a pillow under your heads in the ground where you are lying—this Great League which you established; although you said that far away in the future the Great League would endure."

A second time they sang the hymn, and then Tododaho called the roll of the Founders, commencing with Tehkarihhoken and ending with Tyuhninhohkawenh, and after each name the Royanehs thundered the responses:

"This was the roll of you,
You who were joined in the work,
You who completed the work,
The Great League!"

Tododaho reseated himself, and a Royaneh of the Cayugas rose to speak for the so-called Younger Nations—the Cayugas, Oneidas and Tuscaroras.

"Now our uncle has passed away," he recited, "he who used to work for all, that they might see the brighter days to come—for the whole body of warriors and also for the whole body of women, and also for the children that were running around, and also for the little ones creeping on the ground, and also for those that are tied to the cradle-boards; for all these he used to work that they might see the bright days to come. This we say, we three brothers.

"Now another thing we will say, we younger brothers. You are mourning in the deep darkness. I will make the sky clear for you, so that you will not see a cloud. And also I will give the sun to shine upon you, so that you can look upon it peacefully when it goes down.

"Now then another thing we say, we three younger brothers. If any one should fall—it may be a principal chief will fall, a Royaneh, and descend into the grave—as soon as possible another shall be put in his place. This we say, we three Younger Brothers.

"Now I have finished. Now show me the man!"

A hush mantled the council house. All eyes turned toward the door where Tawannears stood with Peter and me. Ganeodiyo and another Seneca Royaneh rose from their places and crossed the room to us. At a sign Tawannears went to meet them. They took position one on each side, with their hands under his elbows, and so guided him into the center of the circle around the council fire. Three times they walked him around the circuit of Royanehs. Then Ganeodiyo spoke.

"Denehogaweh is dead, O Royanehs! Our eyes have been blinded with tears. Our hearts have been heavy. Loudly we have cried our grief. But the forefathers laid down rules for us to follow, and we have followed them. A vacant place must be filled. Work laid aside must be completed. The places left by the founders must be carried on that our children may continue to have peace.

"Behold, O Royanehs, after the tradition of our people, as required by the founders, the wise women of the Wolf Clan gathered in Council. They considered deeply. Donehogaweh was dead. Another of his line must succeed him. Donehogaweh was the Guardian of the Western Door. No foes entered the Long House after he kept watch. Who should endeavor to take his place?

"The wise women pondered, O Royanehs. They continued to ponder. They remembered that Donehogaweh had a nephew, Tawannears, Warden of the Door. He was his uncle's prop, his right hand, a tried warrior, feared by the enemies of the Great League, respected by the subject nations, the friend of our friends.

"Oh, Royanehs, we present him to you! He is no longer Tawannears. He is Donehogaweh! He is the Guardian of the Western Door. Give him your favor!"

"*Aigh! Aighhaigh! Kwa, Kwa!*" applauded the Royanehs.

Peter and I slipped out of the door as they formed in procession and took our station with Kachina—for I can not bring myself to give her the name Gahano by which Tawannears always addressed her—to watch the formal presentation to the assemblage of Senecas gathered in the open around the *gaondote*, or war-post. A shout of approval came from the people when Tawannears, now Donehogaweh, was led forth by Tododaho and Ganeodiyo.

"The Guardian of the Door!" they cried. "He is favored by Hawenneyu! *Kwa! Kwa!*"

Kachina clapped her hands with glee—one of many tricks that proved to me her Caucasian origin.

"He has his uncle's place!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid that fat old she-ant, Guanaea, would make trouble for him. I will put a snake in her bed some night."

"Nonsense!" I rebuked her. "She is your mother. Her eyes are clouded by grief. Be kind, and she will learn to love you."

"Love me! *Hai*, I care not whether she loves me. I have Tawannears' love, and that is enough."

PETER plucked me by the sleeve. "Come!" he whispered.

I followed him behind the nearest *ganasote*, and he pointed to a narrow opening in the wall of the forest opposite, the throat of the Great Trail of the Long House.

"Here is no blace for us," he said. "We hafe saidt goodt-by to Tawannears—who is no longer Tawannears. He has a new life to lif. He must be an Indian of Indians. He has a wife andt a mother-in-law——"

"Who is not his mother-in-law," I gibed.

"*Ja*, berhaps. But dot doesn't matter now. We are white men. He is an Indian. We don't do him no goodt for a time. We petter go, andt leafe him to himself."

"Yes," I agreed slowly. "You are right, Peter. 'Tis strange how tactful you can be—and how talkative. But where shall we go?"

He gave me a curious look.

"It's petter you go home, eh?"

"Home?"

"*Ja!* New York—der gofernor—andt——"

He left the sentence unfinished, for which I was duly grateful. I was conscious of no impelling urge to return to civilization. The zest which had attended our homeward journey was gone from me. But I could not argue against Peter's suggestion. The governor expected a report from me. For the rest, I shrugged my shoulders. But I did not hunger for the house in Pearl Street. I did not even attempt to picture what awaited me there.

A snow-storm overtook us near the headwaters of the Mohawk, and after securing snow-shoes from an Oneida village we decided we might as well save time by pushing straight southeast through the forest country on the west bank of Hudson's River, avoiding Fort Orange[1] and the contiguous settlement, and crossing the river at the first point we came to where the ice would hold. Corlaer knew every inch of this wild land, and was never at a loss to steer a bee-line in any direction he fancied.

But as a result of this we saw no other white men until we reached the outlying villages above New York, and their residents could give us no tidings of the town's affairs, for they had been cut off by the great drifts since Christmas—a feast to which we had given no thought. We had completely lost track of days and were not even sure of the month. For years we had regulated ourselves by the seasons. It was hot or cold, Winter or Summer, with us. We let it go at that.

The burghers of the Out-ward eyed us askance for the wastrels we seemed in our deerskin shirts and leggings, bearskin robes belted about us, hair and beard sweeping our shoulders. And as it chanced we saw none we knew until we reached the Broadway just above the Green Lane, when honest John Allen, my clerk, turned the corner in face of us and would have passed on, with an uneasy glance for our ruffian pair.

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[1] Albany.

"How, now!" I cried. "Is it so you greet your master, John?"

He dropped his bundle of papers in the snow and his chin sagged to his chest.

"'Tis never you, Master Ormerod! Why, we had given you up two years gone—all, that is, save Master Burnet. But for him the magistrates would have settled your estate."

Now, why it was I know not, but at this I was smitten with an insane desire to laugh, and I rocked my sides so that people across the way deemed me witless and hastened by us.

"I am glad there is one man of intelligence left," I said when I had found my breath again. "But I never doubted the governor, John."

"He is governor no longer, sir."

"What?"

Even Peter fetched out a shrill Dutch curse.

"Aye, sir. But last month the Lords of Trade gave him notice transferring him to Massachusetts. He sailed ten days since."

"He is gone hence?"

"'Tis so, sir."

"But who has his place?"

"Master Montgomery, sir. And oh, Master Ormerod, things are very different from what they were. The malcontents in the town have the new governor's ear. There is much ado about municipal reforms, and small thought to the fur-trade and the alliances with the savages that Master Burnet gave thought to."

I clapped an arm on Peter's fat shoulder.

"Then here are two shall give Master Montgomery somewhat to think on," I proclaimed. "We'll tell him of the Wilderness Country, eh, Peter? We'll acquaint him with the doings of the French! We'll make plain to him the empires and kingdoms that lie waiting the Englishman, if he have but the courage of his ancestors!"

"*Nein,*" said Peter. "You go."

"But you?"

"I go wit' John here."

"Have it your own way," I returned cavalierly. "Shall I find the governor in the fort, John?"

"Aye, sir." He hesitated. "But sure, Master Ormerod, you'll stop in Pearl Street. Elspeth and——"

"Anon, anon," I said airily. "I am not much of a home-body, John."

And I swaggered on my way, poor fool, secretly fearful of the memories that Pearl Street might evoke.

At the fort I was recognized by an officer, and he passed me into the governor's house with a celerity that made me fume all the more during the hour I must cool my heels in his anteroom. But all things end in time, even the whims of jacks-in-office. A liveried servant opened the inner door, and I was ushered in my motley forest-garb into a room which expressed in every detail the finicking niceties of its occupant.

A small man, with a pompous carriage, insignificant features expressing vanity and pride, Master Montgomery made no effort to disguise his displeasure that a citizen should have ventured to appear before him so roughly dressed.

"Master Ormerod?" he said. "Ah, yes, I am aware who you are, sir. The late—ah—governor was pleased to give me some account of you, and of the—ah—ridiculous mission upon which he was pleased to dispatch you. Close to four years gone, was it not? You have been over-long, sir. I——"

"One moment," I interrupted. "You call my mission ridiculous. Are you aware, sir, that I have traveled where no Englishman has been before? Do you understand the value of the information I bring? Does it mean nothing that I have news of the French dispositions in the Wilderness Country?"

He waved me to silence.

"You attach unnecessary importance to your wanderings, Master Ormerod," he reproved me. "Here, sir, we have work sufficient to occupy us for many generations. The—ah—failures of my predecessor, I venture to assert, may be ascribed to his unfortunate predilection to extravagant views and policies. The day for such delusions, I assure you, is past. Here in New York we are now occupied with the important task of improving the lot of our loyal, law-abiding citizens, and the abatement of hindrances to trade and commerce."

He selected a paper from several on the table before him.

"I have here a draft of a new charter I

am issuing to the citizens! Too little attention has been paid to such matters, and it shall be my care to——"

"Do I understand you have no ear for my report, your Excellency?" I broke in.

"Some other time, Master Ormerod. At the present, I am occupied with affairs of serious moment."

"But the French——"

"Tut, tut, sir," he remonstrated severely. "Here is over-much stress upon the French. Another fault of my—ah—distinguished predecessor was to exaggerate the animosity of the French. Treat the French fairly, live and let live, so you may construe my policy. I have no fault to find with French expansion. There is land enough for all on this continent. As for the near-by savages, we have humored them more than is good for them. In future——"

How I got from that room I do not remember, but in some way I dammed the flow of pompous rhetoric and futile reasoning, brushed by all who would have questioned me in the fort, and found my way by oft-trodden paths into Pearl Street. I was still seething with indignation as the red-brick house came in view. When I tapped at the door none answered me, so I pushed it open and entered the wide hallway. I called, but no answer was returned. And then I heard a bubbling chuckle of mirth in the rear garden, capped by Corlaer's squeaking laughter.

It was as if a secret hammer tapped at my inmost heart. I caught my breath, and stepped softly through the corridor to the door which gave on the garden. I opened it gently, and a gay scene appeared. On the steps below me sat stout Scots Elspeth, heedless of the snow, and John Allen, both of them helpless with laughter; and in the garden's center a small, lusty urchin in breeches, a wooden scalping-knife clutched in one mitten-covered fist circled cautiously the ponderous figure of Corlaer, who contrived a most realistic mimicry of panic-fear.

"And now I shall scalp you!" the urchin shrieked gleefully.

But Peter gestured him towards me, and the boy turned with a glad cry. The knife dropped from his hand. There was a scurry of feet, and two arms were stretched up to me, two brown eyes—eyes that it seemed I had looked into so many times before—shone into mine.

"You have come back!" shouted the treble voice. "John said you would! And so did Master Burnet! Do you always wear a beard! Will you buy me clothes like those you and Peter wear? Will you teach me to cast the tomahawk and shoot with the bow and arrow? Will you take me to live with the Indians? Did you kill very many this time? What did you find beyond the sunset?"

I swept him in my arms, brown eyes beaming steadily through the mist that veiled my sight.

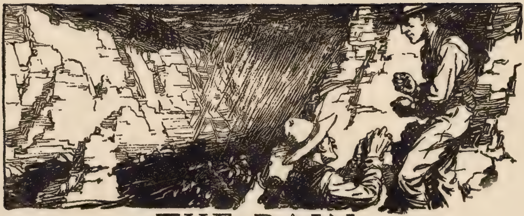
"I found contentment—and love," I said.

Elspeth burst into tears.

"*Hecht*, but them's the bonny worrds," she blubbered. "The master's hame and richt in his mind again!"

My son's bubbling laughter stirred me afresh, and I peered over his shoulder to perceive Corlaer waltzing like a clumsy bear, with John Allen's sedate person clasped against his enormous belly. And I sat down beside the boy and laughed, too, laughed as I had laughed in bygone years, with the joyous vigor of a happy heart.

THE END



THE RAIN

by BARRY SCOBEE

Author of "Even Up," "Seven Fools," etc.

THE eight men crowded around the plain kitchen table, breathing laboredly, eyes intent. Ben Gyllum, the youngest, dealt slowly from a pack of red-backed playing cards. When he reached himself he paused.

"Another thing," said he. "The man that gets the joker and uses the dynamite, if he gets caught he plays a lone hand? Doesn't squeal on the rest of us?"

"I reckon that goes without saying," answered Big Tom Sitter, looking around the circle.

The ranchmen grunted or nodded grimly. Old Uncle Lemmy Miller was trembling, his bony right hand dancing on the table till Ben felt sorry for him.

Gyllum flipped off a card to himself. It was not the joker. He started around again slowly. The joker—he himself had suggested it as the lot card with the sense of humor that was always close to the surface. And these grim southwestern men, dry as the drought over the land, had accepted it without comment.

"For ——'s sake!" jerked out Bame. "Deal faster!"

Ben scarcely heard. He wondered if these neighbors of his would let him out of the plot should he confide to them that he was on parole from a state's prison and liable to serve eight years if caught in wrongdoing. He shouldered the temptation aside however with the thought that he had never been a quitter.

The joker did not fall on the second round, and he began the third. Outside his cattle were bawling unbrokenly in their thirst madness. He knew they were milling around the well down the rocky hill in a cloud of dust. This morning he had found the well "gone dry" instead of the usual three or four feet of water that seeped in over night. The sheet of underground water had finally given out.

Ben forgot the dealing of the cards. He thought of his home, the house that they were in—an unshaded, obscenely ugly one-room shack on top of the hill, and of the hospital lot close by where three cows with month-old calves were perishing for something green, and of seven hides hanging on the fence from victims of the drought.

Then his mind's eye took in a wider scope—the drought-burned world, endless miles of it out there under the brazen sun and gray mountains, and distant hazy horizons, and in all the vast empty space not a house to be discerned, nor a human being, nor green thing, nor water.

No water. It meant ruin, and ruin meant losing his home and probably going away. Going away! God, he thought in sudden reverence, how he loved it—this free clean land, these far distances, the clear-cut peaks, the pleasant winds!

And now to get water that he and these others must have to survive on the range he was participating in a plot to dynamite a dam—

"Say," spoke up Bame harshly, "if you ain't goin' to deal let me take that deck."

"Catch me!" grinned Ben. "When I'm aimin' to deal you the unlucky bean."

He flipped the cards rapidly face up, and when he came to himself on this third round he dealt the joker.

The brown, weather-beaten men, tense as the dry sky outside seemed to be, relaxed a little and looked from the card to Ben. Relief was in their faces. Uncle Lemmy's lips trembled.

"The dynamite," said Sitter mercilessly, "is in the little crib between the garage and the main corral."

"And use it as quick as hades will let you!" admonished Brown. "My stuff ain't drunk for twenty-fo' hours."

"My-o, my-o, why can't God-a'mighty let it rain?" wailed Uncle Lemmy. "If that gang ketches Ben at the dam they'll drill him."

"And if Ben fails," cut in Bame, "he'll answer to us. Gyllum, by ——, if you fail you don't stay in this country, savvy? We won't have a traitor or a weakling for a neighbor."

"I reckon that's right," stonily agreed Sitter, the king bee of the group.

The seven were looking at Ben. He took up a cup to dip a drink to wet his suddenly dry mouth, but the pail was empty. There wasn't even water for human beings on this ranch.

"Well?" demanded the impatient Bame. "Have you got guts to blow the dam or not?"

Ben gave them his slow grin, though his thoughts were anything but mirthful.

"Your cattle'll drink my health in running water in the cañon tonight," he said.

WHEN John Whitefowl came out from the East and dammed up an arm of Chimney Rock Cañon by dumping a few thousand dollars worth of wet cement and sand into a crack of the rocks the people, with humorous allusion to its comparative vastness in this land of little rain, called the resulting lake Noah's Flood.

Ben's seven fellow plotters lived along the cañon below the water, and Ben lived at the foot of it. The cañon was bent like an Indian bow and was fourteen miles long, but by a cow-trail that was the string of the bow it was but nine miles from Gyllum's shack to the lake.

In the late afternoon, long after the seven in their two cars had pulled away, and when the shady sides of the mountains were beginning to don their blue and purple and lavender evening garbs, Ben mounted Bay Boy, his one horse, and headed out on the cow-trail that undulated over the ribs and roots of the mountains.

Ben's mouth was parched, and the sun was yet hot, and he rode doggedly. But after a while the saddle shook talk out of him and he addressed Bay Boy—down in his thought, of course.

"Old scout," said he, "it's a funny proposition. If I don't blow up the dam I'm a traitor to my neighbors, or a weakling. If I do and get caught I am a criminal and may be shot like a coyote by these law and order people. If I don't get caught I'm a hero-ee and a gent. Hanged if I do and hanged if I don't. I want to do it and I don't want to do it.

"For the life of me I can't tell whether I'm heading on to this job to get water for my own cattle, or to save old Uncle Lemmy and the others, or because I'm afraid not to. As the chaplain used to say, my motives are mixed. What I need is an inspiration."

But he was not mixed as to one thing, and that was the desperate need for water. The few cattle he saw, instead of chewing cuds or grazing like peaceful kine, were stranded high and dry like boats at low tide, up here on the dry hills too weak to get to water, standing spraddle-legged and bawling pitifully. And he knew that the stock along the cañon were no better off.

At the comb of the last ridge before he dropped down out of sight of his place he turned in the saddle and craned back—the brown shack, the sunlit land, the far-flung hills.

And when he rode on he felt like a man riding out of paradise.

But a hero-ee and a gent can't keep on regretting about paradise when there's some hades under his feet to be junked. So farther along Ben and Bay Boy left the trail and dropped down the dusty slope to Uncle Lemmy's ranch buildings to quench the drought fire inside of themselves and to eat and rush on to the firing-line.

At the kitchen well Cesario, the sturdy old Mexican hand, was drinking and just starting townward with a load of hides that he had peeled from drought-stricken cattle with a horse, swingletree and a strong rope.

He handed a tin soup bowl of cold water to Ben, and Ben drank like a snorting horse.

"Whew!" he spluttered. "I c'd drink a whole rain dry."

He found Uncle Lemmy in bed with his boots on, too distressed even to grunt a howdy. And his old helpmate sat beside him the picture of utter dejection slowly swaying a fan.

" 'S'all right, Aunty Rachel," Ben tried to comfort. "It's goin' to rain or something, I betcha, and the cattle'll drink, and you and Uncle Lemmy will get to make that trip to your old Kentucky home yet."

Aunty Rachel did not cease with the fan, nor speak, nor look at Benny, as she called him. She only shook her head, once, almost imperceptibly.

Hope was low and despair was high. Some hades to be junked. Ben had Cesario's wife to set out some supper, and presently he had finished and was on his way, a canteen of water swishing at the cantle.

"Well," and he sighed from saddle to hat, "I got my inspiration. Poor old Aunty."

Ben well knew the temper of the men he might have to deal with at Noah's Flood. He and his seven fellows of the cañon had gone there the previous day to ask John Whitefowl for water, and the rich and short, and drought-harrassed ranchman, sometimes quite sociable, had laughed in their faces for all the world like a maid of Babylon scorning a suitor.

"—— you!" blurted the irritable Bame.

"Now wait," cautioned Sitter. "Listen, John——"

"You're talking through your hat!"

"You forget," Sitter went on, being a man who passed up impetuosity and his own feelings to get what he wanted, "that when you built that dam, after you got the crack in the solid rock all filled, that you put on ten feet more o' cement, like a fence. It's that thin ten feet we want to blast through.

"Your lake is a half-mile long, and a good long swim across, and a hundred feet deep. To break out that thin wall will let out about three feet o' water. You'd never miss it, but it would fill the holes down the cañon and last till the rain comes. And set the grass and weeds to greening in the low places."

But the proposition was so absurd, and ghastly and through the hat, that John Whitefowl was too disgusted to answer them. He simply curled his lips in a snarlless snarl.

"*But we're out o' water!*" some ranchman had put in with all the profound emphasis that fact could lend.

"How many cattle you got?" suddenly shot Whitefowl, sticking a finger like a six-shooter at one of the men.

"Eight hundred!"

"And you?"

"Five hundred, John," quavered Uncle Lemmy. "And a mortgage to pay off or——"

"And you?"

"Sixteen, on their feet" answered Ben.

"Ha-haw-haw!" roared the drought-harrassed owner of water in utter scorn. "I've got sixteen thousand head and seven hund'rd sections. I'm piping water across the mountains. Three pipe lines. Eight gasoline engines. Costing me two hundred dollars a day for that alone. I need that water. I'm not going to take any chance at craking that dam and losing the whole lake. Good-by, —— you! Get out!"

And the harrassed ranchman, who hadn't mastered all the intricate details of southwestern ranch business contact, turned and short-legged it up the hill toward his castle of a house, with his two foremen following. But at a few yards he stopped and informed the gaping eight:

"Don't you men try any shenanigans with that dam. Understand? There'll be funerals if you do!"

THE dynamite was in the box just as Sitter had said, at least twenty sticks. And Ben, like any novice, was afraid of the stuff. But remembering Aunty Rachel's desolate shake of the head and the longed-for trip back to the old home, he refused to harken to the suggestions of fear and set to work with all the enthusiasm of some men pocketing a snake.

By the light of a tiny flash-lamp he inserted three feet of fuse in a percussion cap and imbedded the cap in the end of a stick of dynamite, then bound the paper cover back nicely, all as Sitter and Bame had explained. Next he tied the twenty sticks into a bundle with an old saddle-rope, leaving a dangling end of ten feet or so.

The top of the dam was not more than fifty feet across. It dropped away on the lower side a hundred feet. Down beneath, where water trickled through, was a camping-place for travelers, or where Mexicans sometimes stopped overnight. Ben made for the middle of the narrow top of the dam.

"When you get there," the others had hammered into him, though common horsesense would have told him what to do, "light the fuse and let the bundle of dynamite down with the rope to the narrow ledge ten feet below the top. Then beat it for the chapparal, for it will take just about forty-five seconds for three feet of fuse to burn."

When Ben knelt on the narrow dam midway across he was tense. He could hear the blood pound in his ears. And other sounds were distinct. A woman's laugh cascaded and trickled and rippled down from the house on the hill. A corral gate squeaked in the light wind. A fish leaped on the surface of shadowy, sweet-smelling Noah's Flood. And far, far off a wolf howled to his kind for help to slay.

Then mortal existence took on sudden danger. Steps sounded on the rocky shore, on the side opposite Ben's approach. A watchman. Ben could dimly perceive him.

Thinking of Aunty Rachel's dire need, the hero-ee and gent let the bundle of dynamite over the edge about four feet and held the rope with his foot while he prepared to strike a match to light the fuse. The length of it was a liberal three feet. Ben was liberal at heart, and particularly when he cut quick burning fuse.

He held the fuse below the edge of the wall, and struck the match well down, so that the flare would not be seen. But there must have been a glare, or unusual sound, for the watchman called out, not in alarm but questioningly—

"Hello there?"

Ben gave this no heed. He let go the fuse and seized the rope and allowed the bundle of sticks to drop down until they seemed to rest securely on the narrow ledge ten feet below. Then he dropped the rope.

As he did so he became aware of two startling things. One was that somebody was camped below the dam. He heard the smack of feet and the rattle of a wagon, as if somebody had jumped down from the vehicle. He thought it was Cesario camping *en route* to town.

And the other startling thing was that when he let go the rope the bundle of dynamite, insecurely placed on the ledge despite his care, toppled over and went in a rasping slide down the face of the dam.

All this happened in about two seconds. The guard called out urgently:

"Who is it? Or I'll shoot!"

Cool as the breeze ruffling the water Ben straightened up and yelled:

"Cesario! Cesario! Run! *Corre! Corre!* Run! Dynamite!"

He heard startled exclamations, then frightened howls from a dozen throats down below. Bullets began to crack past him from the watchman. He turned and fled along the narrow rim of the dam in the dim starlight, water or an abyss to cushion a fall.

There came yells from the castle on the hill.

Finally, after an age, Ben finished his stooping, cramp-legged race from the dam. He raced tiptoe through a gate, across a corral, where horses started back noisily. There were many rampant voices up the hill. The watchman set up a shouting. Ben got through another gate and closed it after him. And he started trotting tiptoe softly along a rocky road that would take him to where Bay Boy waited.

Then came a blasting explosion, and hardly distinguishable as separate sounds, two or three more blasts—the scattered dynamite. But no sound of rushing, roaring water.

He had failed. There would be no water for the perishing cattle. Aunty Rachel would gain no comfort.

"Hanged if I do and hanged if I don't!"

He heard John Whitefowl bawl out at the top of his lungs:

"Get the scoundrel! Shoot to kill! A hundred dollars to the man that gets him!"

Down near, just over a clump of rocks he heard a running man sing out:

"I'll get him! I'll drown him! And this country'll back me up in it!"

And Ben well knew the country would be up in arms against a miscreant that could attempt to steal another man's water-source in the midst of a drought. And seven men of the cañon would be against him because he had failed, for he assumed that the dynamite had not broken the dam.

"A hero-ee and a gent? A dud!"

He spat disgustedly.

BEN rode heavily. He was heavy in his mind. He thought of turning off down to Uncle Lemmy's, so that he could have water both for himself and Bay Boy in the morning, but he hadn't the heart to see old Aunty's despair nor to face Uncle after his own failure at the dam. So he turned off up hill to go to the Hackett boys' place. There was water there and he would have time to think, whereas company might drop in on him any time down at his own shack—company like Deputy Sheriff S. R. (Shorty-Red) Armstrong, for instance.

The Hackett boys had a snug house of stone away up on the mountains, four miles above Ben's place, with a spring in the corner of the kitchen. In the face of the drought they had sold their stuff from the fourteen sections they owned to John Whitefowl and gone back to the university to finish their technical courses.

Ben arrived at the square, squat, stone, cairn-like place just as the yellow, nearly full moon broke the eastern horizon. There was no lock on the door. He went in, blew some floating bugs off the spring-filled keg by the light of an oil-lamp, drank, and carried a wash-basin full to Bay Boy.

Everything was as it had been the last time he had ridden up the hill to listen to the radio, a neat detector-two-step outfit that picked up easily from El Paso. It lay on the table between the two twin army cots. He lay down and took up the telephones, hoping there might yet be a piece or two of music. Soothing, soft music would help him compose himself.

The full force of the air waves came to him, with his tuning, on the last of "The Star Spangled Banner," and this was broken off before the end by a quick, insistent voice.

"Wait! Listen! Just a moment, please! Here is something special for West Texas people. We have received a telegram from the sheriff at Blue Mountain asking us to broadcast an alarm—um, here, I'll read it. Listen, West Texas:

" 'Arrest and hold Ben Gyllum, small rancher near here. Tried to blow up John Whitefowl dam. Failed, but explosion killed Mexican. I hold warrants attempted property destruction and murder. He was identified by his voice when he called a warning. About twenty-six years old, five feet ten inches in height, weight one hundred sixty, gray eyes, when last seen was dressed in ranch clothes, and had a weeks' growth of beard. Hold and notify me. Ard Carlyle, sheriff.'

"Just a moment, please," spoke the radio man in El Paso. "Just a moment and I'll repeat this."

Ben listened through the second time, and when the tale was told he rose, lighted the kerosene stove to heat water, changed his own clothing for fairly good garments the Hackett boys had left, shaved with a nail run through a safety razor blade, washed his feet, and went out to Bay Boy.

"Old-timer," said he, "you've done me many a good turn. I'm going to ask one more favor of you before we part company."

Old Bay Boy looked around at Ben and whinnied low.

"I want you to carry me to Pecos, where I can catch the train. And I'll sell you there, with all the joy and abandon that I'd sell a brother, and I'll take the money and go away. For, Boy, I ain't going to be taken."

Ben mounted and started down the trail that would take him to his shack, and on.

The moon lantern was hanging high now, lighting the world sufficiently to show the hills and ranges as black masses, and the great ancient bottom of the sea stretching to the northward as a shadow. A girl lived in that shadow off toward the handle of the Great Dipper——

He had ridden down this trail many a time under the sun and under the moon in the two years he had been in this country. He had meant sometime to buy the fourteen sections from the Hackett boys to go with his measly two sections that he had bought with money borrowed from an old friend of his father. The resulting ten thousand or so acres would be just a start.

How he loved this adopted homeland of his. Somehow it spoke of God, and God's ways, and God's peace. But it was good-by now.

"I'm sorry I killed a man," he went on in his thought as if he were speaking aloud to Bay Boy. "I'm sorry for that. But I won't be taken, to go back to the pen on the old score, or to go again on the new score. Nope. I've settled that, Boy, old pal.

"Besides, if I get caught and the lawyers get to pawing over this affair they'll find out about the plot and the others, with old

Uncle Lemmy, will get in bad. Nope, I've decided.

"Going to Pecos ain't a nice, safe way, but I'm not known there, and it's the best bet in sight.

"Nope, Boy, I'm not going back to a treadmill prison. Inside of stone walls wishing when you go to sleep at night and when you wake up in the morning, and wishing when you eat, and wishing when you work, a-wishing all the time you were out and doing something for yourself, getting up a home, progressing, which is the natural law for men and horses. But all you do in prison is mark time—mark time, unless you get a certain mental slant, which I didn't. I just wished, and wished, and wished——"

There was a minute's stop at the shack while he got his saddle-boot and rifle. It almost broke his cattleman's heart to ride away and leave his cattle down by the well bawling at their long-drawn complaint burdened with suffering and tainted with madness. He could hear Sitter's cattle too, far off in the night in an unbroken wailing prayer to their gods for water.

"A-wishin' and a-wishin' and a-wishin' like a man in the pen," thought Ben.

A SURPRIZE awaited Ben Gyllum in the "salt cedar" town of Pecos, where he arrived at that cool hour of the morning when the sun and feed stable maids, and restaurant waiter-cooks, and the like, were getting up for the day. He left Bay Boy and his rifle at a stable and strode stiffly away to a restaurant for breakfast, planning to hunt a buyer for the horse a bit later.

The surprize was in the restaurant, when he slid up to the counter elbow to elbow with another early bird. And this early bird was Deputy Sheriff Shorty-Red Armstrong.

Shorty-Red said hello, and his open gaze rested on Ben without a flicker of surprize or triumph, as if he knew nothing about Ben's being wanted. The look was disarming for Ben. It caused the impulse in him to flee or fight to wane, and caused hope to spring up. If Shorty-Red didn't know! But Shorty-Red proceeded to smash this hope—

"I figgered," said that diminutive red-haired officer friendlily, moving close so that the waiter cook would not hear, "that you'd be lightin' in here to ketch the choo-choo for that place you call Chi. I just arriv'."

It was like that other arrest, thought Ben, so unobtrusive. He remembered momentarily the hot Summer day in the wheat-fields, the day after he and four other blanket stiffs, following the wheat harvest north, had robbed the little country bank. They had divided the spoils and separated. He was hitting somewhere to buy land, a home, with his part, and swearing to himself never to be dishonest again, when along the dusty road which he trudged came a big automobile, slowing up at the last and a man speaking:

"Hey, bo', how'd you like a lift to the sheriff's office? Save you walkin' and packing all that bunklesome paper money you got."

After that there had been a succession of events—confession, return of the money, ten years sentence by the judge who said the wheat-field lads needed a lesson shoved down their throats—prison.

He had't liked it all. He didn't like the prospects now. But it wasn't in Ben Gyllum to sulk.

"Shorty-Red," said he, "I've always admired your smartness up to now. But now you're too —— smart."

"Tee-hee-hee," giggled the deputy. "'At's about what the hicker'nut said to the cracker when it got between the jaws."

"I figgered you'd figger," said Ben, "that I would make a break for the Mexican border and you'd have a bunch of deputies strung along, you and Sheriff Ard Carlyle."

"I figgered you'd figger I'd figger like that, so I come to Pecos. How far was you aimin' to blow, Ben?"

"Oh, far's Chi may be."

"Chi! Ben, that's the onliest thing I got agin you, callin' some place Chi like a Smart Alec."

This was an old joke between them. Shorty-Red followed it with a pressing down on his former question, in genuine puzzlement.

"Why you runnin' so hard, Ben?"

"Why does any man run? Handcuffs jingling in his ears."

But this did not satisfy the officer, and he said as much and admitted he was plain downright curious.

"You afraid o' that other, up noa'th?" he asked in a low voice.

"That—up north? You know that?" Ben was abruptly wrought up.

"Yep."

"And the whole —— country? Have you blabbed it?"

"Nope. Me and Ard. And we ain't talky on some sub-jicks. We been keepin' an eye on you for two years per the request o' that northern warden. Our reports is O.K."

"And what will they be in the face of my trying to blow up the dam and killing a Mexican? It is to snigger!"

"Killin' a Mex! How'd you know that, Ben Gyllum? You didn't hang around at Noay's Flood long enough to find out, did you?"

"Radio, Hackett Brothers."

"Oh-o-o—that's where you shaved and got them clo'es. So El Paso broadcasted that, eh? It was phoned into us from the Whitefowl place, and we got the warrants and wired El Paso."

Ben took up greedily in both hands the thick, hot coffee-cup that the waiter set before him. Shorty-Red leaned over his ham-and, very thoughtful, and it was not until the sharp edge of his appetite was bent that he spoke again.

"Ben, I'll give you these two warrants I got if you'll take 'em back to Ard Carlyle. Savvy? Go in voluntary."

"Shorty-Red," replied Ben, "you've never been in the pen."

"You go back, Ben, and tell 'em you're ready to pay the fiddler, and laugh the thing aside as if it was a little co-in-cidence of the dog days."

"Laugh aside the killing of a Mexican!" It was Ben's turn to be puzzled.

"Well, Chi, I'll tell you, it's like this: You go back voluntary and I think a lot o' this will blow over. But you go back in my custody and there will forever and aye be a taint against you, like a taint of whisky in the church punch, or a whisper against a woman's fair name. 'He was arrested once for murder and tryin' to destruct property.' Hear the whisper? Till you're gray. And remember also in this connection, Ben, that they's a girl down this side o' the mountains. Eh? Remember?

"What I'm trying to do, Ben, is to get you to go back of your own free will and accord so's the black mark of being a fugitive and of being arrested won't be against you for life."

"Sweet talk," thought Ben. Deputy sheriffs and prosecuting attorneys seemed to be gifted for it. But Shorty-Red couldn't pull the wool over his eyes. Even if all of Shorty-Red's talk was sound, still he did not know how much trouble Ben's going back would cause seven other men.

"Well?" asked the deputy.

"Look here," began Ben, "you don't know what you're saying. These things can't be laughed aside. The law doesn't forgive. They'd shoot me straight to the pen.

"And, Shorty-Red, you've never been in the pen. You don't know what a lovely place it is, and how the convicts cry for it. You've never marked time in one of 'em, never went to bed wishing you were free, never got up wishing you were out working for yourself, never wanted to be out in the sunlight, never been locked up longing for something you can't have—like the cattle last night restless for water with the sound of madness edging their bawling. You've never been there, Shorty-Red, or you wouldn't talk so easy about going back voluntary."

"I take it then," observed Shorty-Red, sliding down from his high stool, "that you'll need assistance in *ree*turning."

"You're an intelligent and far-seeing *hombre*, Shorty-Red."

"All right, Chi. I'm the law's little pinching-bug. Will you go light, or will you need my nice new shiny, all-steel, nonfilable, whirl-around wristlets to keep out the cold?"

"I'll play fair, Shorty-Red, because you seem to have played fair with me. You'll need to use the playthings you mention, because I won't stop at anything much to keep from accepting your kind and loving invitation to go back to the Blue Mountain jail."

"Meaning," mused freckled Shorty-Red, "that one red-headed, undersized undersheriff better watch out he ain't the victim of another killing. Well, I got to take the flivver to the gairage to have its vigor renewed. We won't start for some hours. In the meanwhile you can adorn yourself with these things." He tossed Ben the handcuffs. "But I'll add, Chi, that you'll go in voluntary yet, and prove yourself."

From the time the sheriff's officer and his man in handcuffs left Pecos in the rattling car some unnamed thing of nature seemed to be impending.

The afternoon was unquenchably hot. Little scootings and tendrils of dust curled in the vagrant breeze on the half-desert to either side of the road. The men were weary and grimly silent, except that once Shorty-Red voiced the bitterness and dryness in him:

"One —— of a drought! Why can't it rain?"

Once their interest revived as they counted the whirlwinds in the vast spreading flatlands—miniature cyclones twisting and shifting the dun dust skyward in shapes like funnels, and bent trees, and trailing rags. One counted thirty-nine, the other forty-two, at one time.

"Something's threatening, sure as shootin'," asserted Shorty-Red.

They beheld a still stranger sight, one that had somehow a sort of superstitious alarm. A tawny bobcat and a jackrabbit galloped across the country, parallel and about fifty yards apart, in the same direction. They traveled oblivious to their surroundings, and crossed the road ahead of the car, the cat not a stone's throw away, never swerving.

"They're going toward Chimney Rock Creek," mused Ben. "Great guns, Shorty, I wonder if water is coming down?"

"Them wild things scent water, no question about that, since they ain't no fire to make 'em flee so. I'll bet four bucks she's raining in the mountaings."

And when they had gone miles farther, and turned out from behind a long row of trees so that they could see, they beheld a great black, wet cloud lying on the peaks, a stormy, savage monster.

Shorty-Red pushed himself over the side of the car to the running-board, but still holding the steering wheel, and he straightened and filled his lungs, and threw back his head like a howling wolf, and sent a prolonged yell out upon the empty spaces.

"Who-o-o-o-o-ee—hi-iy-u-u! The —— drought is busted!"

He got soberly back into the seat, and looked at Ben, who was hunched down listlessly.

"Why in —— don't you celebrate too?" demanded Shorty-Red.

"It's come too late for me," said Ben. "And for the Mexican that was killed."

They passed through the town of Balmorhea without stopping. The whole population it seemed, men, women and children, was in the streets gazing toward the storm in the mountains, yelling lustily now and then, waving arms, their faces uplifted with gladness as of besieged people at the news of a rescue.

Shorty-Red did not allow the invigorated flivver to lag, and he hit for the shortest cuts. Both knew why, and the thoughts that were in Ben's mind caused him to rattle the handcuffs and ask—

"Where'd you keep the key to these things?"

Shorty-Red opened the front of his shirt and showed the little key on a greasy pink baby ribbon against his hairy breast.

"I know what you're thinking," said he. "Wild Haw Pass. Or the whole Chimney Rock Cañon for that matter. But I figger we can get to Whitefowl's place before the flood fills the cañon.

"In fact," the officer continued, "it's up to us to get there as soon as possible. I phoned from Pecos, when you stayed with the marshal, and told the girl up the line to give a general alarm ring and tell the people that you and me would be at Noay's Flood by supper-time. I figger some of the ranchmen will be there to thrash over this matter with you maybe."

"You ain't got me there yet, Shorty."

"Nope. I'll take off them things if you will promise——"

"Nothing doing. I'm going to get loose if I can."

At Wild Haw Pass the cañon narrows down until a saddle rope will reach from stone wall to stone wall, and the walls rise upward to nearly three hundred feet. The place is a crack in the rock where the road and the cañon creek, ordinarily dry, pass through. The water had been known to rise in flood times half-way up the walls in this "tight squeeze."

The cañon spreads out rapidly both above and below the pass. Above, there is a shelf or ledge that once had been the road but that had mostly crumbled away. The pass from below was approached by a steep slope, in length, loud calling distance. Before starting this climb that would take them and their car into the narrow cleft, Shorty-Red brought the machine to a standstill.

"Ben," said he, "I figger that to play safe you ought to trot ahead up to the pass and see if you see anything of the flood before we rush into the pearly gate. Seein' you're locked up in them shiny ring-a-rounds I aim to travel careful."

Ben got out and shook the crimps from his legs.

"I'll take the bracelets off," offered Shorty-Red, "if you'll announce a armistick."

"Nope." Ben shook his head. "I don't want to be stubborn, but there's hope till a guy's hung, you know, and I may get loose yet."

"You're a reg'lar louse to pussyvere. I'm tellin' you, it'd be better to go in voluntary."

Ben shrugged and started up the slope of solid stone to where the walls approached closest.

"If you see old Mister High Water moseying down," called Shorty, "holler so's I can get turned around, and you beat it back on the reachin' gallop, because one number three lady's size deputy sheriff ain't goin' to linger longer."

Shorty-Red was feeling fine and talkative, over the rain. The smell of freshness in the air, the bombardment of the distant storm, was loosening him, changing the ingrained grimness to peace.

Thunder rumbled like giant gods bowling with round worlds over bumpy space. A thin curtain of rain hung itself across the cañon a mile away. It began to seem as if the meeting at Whitefowl's might be postponed, and that two men traveling by flivver might get drenched.

"But gosh, who cares much?" chuckled Shorty-Red. "The drought's busted and the cattle are drinkin'."

When Ben reached the summit of the slope and stood in the wasp waist of the cañon he rasped in his breath and peered forward in the gathering duskiness between the precipices.

A gray, slimy, amphibian seeming monster of ancient days was rolling, tumbling, treading down the cañon creek, appearing to feel its slow and careful way. And it banked up back, wave on wave.

Ben knew it for the coming flood that would sweep all before it. He stepped nonchalantly to the old-time ledge and motioned with his manacled arms for Shorty-Red to come on.

Chimney Rock Cañon gets its name from the nature of its rocky sides. The winds and rains and frosts of a million years have worn away the softer portions of stone, evidently, leaving the harder in the shape of pinnacles, or monuments, or chimneys, from a foot to fifteen feet high. This stone jungle is next to impassable, there being constant danger of men dropping between the chimneys and wedging there.

The flood, the teetering, sliding current of the water, had driven Ben and Shorty-Red into the jungle whether or no. And the rising water kept driving them up and up as it rose and rose in terrific waves and splashes. A typical Southwest storm flood filling cañons and dry arroyos and lending the spice of danger.

Half-way up the stone walls of the narrow pass were two red haw-trees growing in crannies of the rock. Floods had been known to reach these. All at once Shorty-Red gestured toward them.

They were being torn away by the mighty current. And even then the water did not cease to rise. The two men scrambled higher and higher.

Finally they gained safety from the flood only to find increasing danger from the rocks. But their ears had become accustomed to the roar, and they found themselves able to half-shout and be heard.

"I'm sorry I run you into the flood," Ben called out abruptly. "But I knew you had a minute or two to spare."

Shorty-Red gestured forgivingly.

" 'S'all in the life," he said. "You'd warned me."

"And the warning still goes. I've got a chance now."

"Gosh," exclaimed Shorty, "but didn't that water rear the flivver up on its hind laigs like a horse and send her a shootin' backwards! You ought to pay for that car."

Cattle were swept by on the tumultuous, greasy-looking flood now and then, either drowned or drought-killed. Ben flung a bitter nod to them.

"That's what the —— flood has done," he snarled.

"—— flood?" expostulated Shorty-Red. "Don't say that. Remember this flood has give thousands of head a drink, and saved the country. Whoopee! She's rained!"

But Ben could not rise to this. The rain was too late for him.

Darkness and rain came on them together. It was no ordinary rain, but such a one as nature chose to send to make up for nearly a year of rainless months. Water smote their coatless backs in splotches and gobs. Thunder exploded all around them.

A tale has gone up and down the world that man cannot endure the steady drip, drip, drip of ice-water on the wrist or temple. These men wriggled and twisted among the rocks with the beat of the cold rain upon their legs, backs, shoulders and faces. The rocks were without mercy, offering no whit of shelter. Then the rain changed to hail.

The misery of the cold and the irony of the rain that was too late for him dragged Ben down into the mire of hate. He would not be taken back to be stared at and sent again to the treadmill of the prison! He would maneuver to get Shorty-Red's revolver, and he would make the deputy unloose him or he would shoot and shoot to kill. Friend or no friend!

The rain, the great downpouring, roaring storms of it, or the hail that swept over either as pelting marbles or as shot-fine torture, beat them clinging to the rocks, and blinded and retarded them.

To kill and escape! To kill and escape! Ben became obsessed with the idea to the exclusion of all else except the attempt to get hold of the officer's gun.

Once he was given to see himself in this light, a potential murderer, but he shut his eyes and would not look. God and nature and mankind seemed to be against him.

In the terrific suffering they endured even Shorty-Red lost his optimism.

The handcuffs retarded Ben, and this infuriated him, but he kept cunningly quiet and worked nearer and nearer to the gun scabbard.

And at last he was close enough. He reached with both hands to seize the big revolver—and found the scabbard empty. Shorty-Red had lost his gun!

Shorty felt Ben's touch, discovered his loss.

Ben leaped upon Shorty-Red, trying to throw his locked arms around the officer to bear hug, and twist, and obtain the key. Shorty struggled loose.

"Oh-ho," he crowed, "so you would get the key, hey? All right, here."

He shoved what seemed to be the string of pink ribbon into Ben's hands. But the key was not on it.

"Where do you 'spose things go to?" derided Shorty-Red. "Key, key, who's got the key? In other words, which pocket?"

IT WAS after midnight, Shorty-Red figured aloud, when the clouds cracked and broke asunder and fled away, leaving the moon riding high like a clean clipper-ship and the stars twinkling through the washed air.

Ben kept on Shorty's trail, close up as he could, and Shorty avoided close quarters. It was like a boys' game of follow the leader.

They approached the edge of the rock jungle eventually. It was but a mile or so from the edge, to the bridge across the cañon at John Whitefowl's buildings. He became more desperate, more cunning. It became his aim to approach from the rear and knock Shorty out with a rock uplifted in both hands. He knew no more mercy now than the stones themselves.

Then Shorty-Red fell sidewise between the chimney rocks. Knocking out a man that is up and going is a different thing from slugging one in a trap. Ben called out—

"You hurt, Shorty?"

"Ye-es," came a grunt. "Help me out, Ben!"

"I can't with these on!"

"Uh. Here's the —— key."

"For ——'s sake don't drop it!"

Ben scrambled down until he found Shorty-Red's up-reared, swaying right arm, and the key between thumb and finger. A moment, and the handcuffs went jangling out among the rocks. Then he tugged Shorty-Red out, a hard and yanking job.

Shorty-Red's knees began to wabble at once and he complained of being hurt "inside and all over."

"Help me out o' these chimbleys, Ben," he pleaded. "Don't leave a feller—gosh, old man, I don't know—you'll have to——"

"I'll help you," decided Ben, "but just to the edge of the rocks. It's coming broad day and I've got to be dusting the highway. Don't aim to get caught now, with my arms free."

But Shorty-Red grew worse. He ceased to talk, and finally even to whimper. He seemed to be approaching coma. It was more difficult all the time for Ben to make headway.

At the edge of the chimneys finally Ben laid Shorty-Red on the brink while he went to hunt a way down. When he got around to the foot of the precipice he found Shorty-Red lying crumpled on the ground. Apparently he had rolled over the twelve-foot bluff.

Ben staggered up to the bridge with Shorty-Red on his back. He slid the burden to the ground none too gently and looked around, panting heavily. He had done his duty to Shorty-Red, he meant now to do his duty by himself and get away. Such a mile as this had been!

He straightened Shorty out flat on his back. He was as listless as a rag. But he could lie there until somebody came across the bridge and found him. Still, the sun was too —— glaring hot to leave a man in Shorty's condition lying in it. There were only boulders for shelter. Behind one of them Shorty could not be seen from the road.

Besides all that nobody might come along the road for two, three days, torn up like they were certain to be after such a rain.

And Shorty-Red—listless as road-side water, scarcely breathing. He needed immediate attention, no two ways about that. Shooting a man to escape, and letting a man perish by the roadside somehow were two different things.

Ben looked hopelessly around. No possible help was visible, though the earth seemed to be resurrected. A jackrabbit hopped about contentedly. Across the rushing cañon stream a little bunch of cows lay in a sunny niche of the hillside chewing their cuds, their great restlessness gone. The sky was clear blue, the mountain peaks sharp cut. All the world was at peace except Ben Gyllum.

He groaned and picked up his limber burden and went staggering on, cursing in a jumbled, mumbling monotone the drought, the rain, the chimney rocks, Shorty-Red, and his own conscience that drove him on with this helpless man.

* * *

THE first sound of man that Ben heard was laughter. Topping the slope of the road that led up to Noah's Flood he beheld the source of the merriment—a group of big-hatted men squatting at the end of the dam, whittling, gossiping, laughing in the sunshine. It had rained, the ground was wet, the cattle were drinking again, and even now the roots were starting upward to make quick herbage. It was full time for men to be lively.

John Whitefowl was the first to look up. Ben was twenty steps away. He slid Shorty-Red to the ground and advanced three or four steps. The others, sensing something, flung around and got up.

The men started forward, demanding to know what in ——. Then they stopped, peering on past Ben to Shorty-Red, and the oddest imaginable expressions came over their faces.

Ben made out the fiery Bame, and Sitter, and Sheriff Carlyle, and five or six others he knew. Their grimness was gone. They seemed hesitant, as if they did not know what to say or do. This puzzled Ben. He flung out—

"Well, here I am!"

A moment of silence, then—

"Why, Ben," ventured Carlyle, "I reckon you ain't wanted, if that's what you mean. John here won't push the charges. You didn't hurt the dam. Anyhow Cesario says he might have been mistaken in the voice, thinking it was you that hollered. And besides all that, sonny—" and portly Art Carlyle's eyes twinkled in bubbling good humor—"it's rained!"

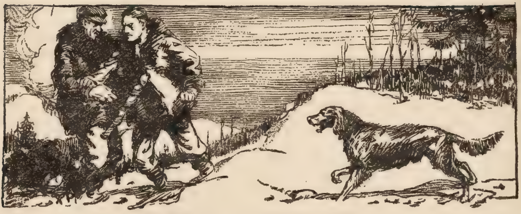
"But the Mexican that was killed?" persisted Ben.

They made no answer. Ben realized they were not looking at him, but on past him, with that curious, puzzled expression. What *was* the matter? He flashed around—and Shorty-Red stood grinning meekly.

"I 'pologize," he said, "for deceivin' you into packin' me a mile and a half on your back. I had to get you in voluntary. And they ain't no killed Mexican, Ben. He was only stunned. He was up and cussin' when I got here that night, but I didn't tell you. You sho' have proved yourself up to this country, Ben. Shake?"

Shorty-Red stuck out a freckled hand, and the other men crowded up with broad but puzzled grins.

Ben's thought jumped to his ugly, beloved old shack on its sunny hillside, and leaped on clear to Pecos. He was glad he had had no chance to sell Bay Boy!



RED DOC III

A Complete Novelette by STANTON C. LAPHAM

Author of "The Black Malemiut," "The Unknown Quantity," etc.

RED DOC III, Irish setter, aristocrat of dogdom, stood upon the dignity of his blood, and not by the lifting of an eyelid did he acknowledge the presence of the huskies. Never before had he heard their weird howling—an echo of the wolf-cry of the North, the far-flung note that sends a chill prickling along the spine, causing a man in the open to feel for his rifle and draw a trifle closer into his sleeping-bag. Red Doc contemptuously regarded his surroundings from dog-pen and trace-dogs to the towering glacial mountains, crowding close. This was no place for him; he was a gentleman; blue ribbons and bench shows were his speciality.

Doc was a pedigreed beauty, a winner at the Madison Square bench three times in his four years of age. These Alaskan dogs bored him. He didn't growl or show his teeth, but silently snubbed the whole pack.

Tall, long-bodied, high-shouldered, mahogany-brown in color, his red-flag held slightly elevated, with bold intelligent head and powerful neck, Red Doc was indeed a picture dog.

The setter had journeyed across the continent in a baggage car and had then been put aboard ship. Swinging up the Alaskan coast through the inland passage, the steamer *Tacoma* had deposited her motley crowd of gold-seekers and dogs on the beach at the feet of the icy Chilcoots. There were no jewel-adorned ladies to exclaim over the beauty of his silken coat, to admire his proud poise of body or to feed him bonbons when Red Doc landed one frozen, wind-screaming day on Alaskan soil.

On the *Tacoma's* manifest, F. J. Price, Doc's owner, had valued him at one thousand dollars. To the inquisitive ship's purser Price—slightly under the influence of liquor—had explained his theory of blooded dogs:

"They ain't worth a ——; that's a fact, purser. That valuable pup there never heard a gun, and a rabbit would scare him to death. I bought him to win blue ribbons on his shape, and that's as far as blood goes. I never saw one of these pink-skinned thoroughbreds that could stand the gaff. This pedigree business makes me sick."

His narrow face seemed to sharpen a little more, if possible, at his shrewd observations.

"And now, —— him," he concluded, "I'll hitch the pedigreed pup to a sled and give him a dose of forty below; that'll bring his nose down a bit, I guess."

Price ground a cigar in the corner of his mouth as if looking foward with savage delight to breaking the blooded dog under the hardships of Alaskan trails and cold.

"Why, I bought the dog from an old geezer that was dead broke," he added. "His clothes was full of holes. The dog was all that he had left. He said that he raised the setter in Lord Somebody's kennels. The old fool cried when he sold me the dog, and then he used to come back to see him and talk me to death about kennels, and field trials and the great strain of Irish setter blood in Doc. Can you beat that, purser?"

"Red Doc III," copyright, 1922, by Stanton C. Lapham.

In the East Price posed as a financier; in the raw West he would have been called a "sure-thing" man. He dealt in "futures." Just now he was promoting a gold-dredging scheme.

With the stockholders' cash safely in his possession Price, the manager, was traveling toward Dawson City to investigate their prospective holdings. It was late in the season for boat travel down the Yukon; and Price planned to reach White Horse before the lakes closed, then take the Winter trail for the Klondike.

Aboard the *Tacoma* dog-pens had been constructed along an alleyway above the stoke-hole. The day before the steamer's arrival at Skagway Price visited the kennels, the first time since leaving port. As he called Red Doc to him a fireman from below decks peered around his shoulder.

"That's a fine-blooded setter," observed the fireman.

Price fixed the sweat-bleached face at his elbow with a contemptuous stare, deigning no reply.

"A dog with points like that is worth something," persisted the stoker.

"If he is I haven't found it out."

Price measured the fireman up and down deliberately.

"He's pedigreed; that's all that ails him," he added.

From beneath the brim of his quilted cap the stoker read arrogance in every line of the man. His snobbery struck fire. Not too gently the fireman crowded in beside Price for a nearer view of the big red dog. He had assumed that appreciation of blood and beauty in a dog was common ground for friendliness among all men.

The blue-blooded Doc, too, seemed insufferably haughty. Head held high, with royal dignity he sniffed at Price identifyingly but did not exhibit attachment. He favored the fireman with one incurious glance and loftily retired to a corner of the kennel. The stoker regarded Price curiously as he turned to the deck.

FOR three months Roger Clark, once trusted employee of a large financial institution in an Eastern city, had buried his identity below decks in the *Tacoma's* boiler-room. Of medium height, Clark would have been considered slight but for the extraordinary breadth of his shoulders and long arms. The cheek and jaw bones of his rather short, wide face seemed devoid of flesh. He was cut to bone and muscle by the unaccustomed toil in the *Tacoma's* stoke-hole.

Roger Clark was of early pioneer New England blood; but notable parentage, a trusted situation and the influence of a devoted sister had failed to save him from folly. The old home and all they possessed had gone to the lawyers to furnish bail and partly to pay the surety company furnishing his bonds. He had exchanged letters several times, through others, with his broken-hearted sister during the months on the *Tacoma*.

Penniless and fleeing the law, Clark had headed for the North. If he could only make his way into the Klondike he could lose himself in the crowd of gold-seekers and make a new start.

With the last trip of the *Tacoma* he had learned that no one was now to be allowed across the Canadian line unless equipped with fifteen hundred pounds of food and outfit. Winter was on in the North, and food was scarce in Dawson. It would be impossible for him to meet the requirement. Then occurred one of those events called "luck."

On the out trip Clark had made the acquaintance of an old sourdough miner. With many nods and winks he allowed that any two-fisted son of a go-gettin' American could slip past them "mounties" and could live off the country. He'd done got his own meat and clothes fur ten year, and any spry young gent could do the same if it was in him.

"She ain't no frozen-to-death iceberg, Alaska ain't," he concluded. "When you know her she's fine. She'll be good to you if you are *all* man, an' got a backbone."

Clark had cultivated the old Alaskan's company during the voyage; and the call of the great North challenged his every waking moment.

RED DOC'S first day in the land of gold and endless trails was one of painful surprizes and humiliations. The congealing breath of a storm on the Chilcoots hurtled down through the pass, mercilessly searching the strip of barren flat to salt water. The trace-dogs in the open dog-pen sought shelter within and about the improvised kennels.

Not so with the pampered scion of dog

nobility. The storm flayed Doc's red coat; and icy crystals, driven like shot, filed his muzzle raw and cut his eyes. Still he persisted in his fastidious dignity. One whiff of the salmon-scented kennels and their plebeian occupants was sufficient. He shivered alone facing the roaring storm. He missed his imported dog-biscuits, and he peered through the swirling desolation in vain for his owner's man, who with proper respect for kings of every breed, with much deference and many sirs, had groomed and exercised him daily.

Doc had never experienced anything remotely comparable to the raw wild into which he had been flung. All his pedigreed life he had done nothing but loaf and be bored.

The gale lulled toward evening. A man in a billowy parka with pistol-report of a loaded dog-whip climbed the corral and dumped numerous piles of evil-smelling food on the ground. He regarded the statuesque Doc in a corner of the pen a moment questioningly, then emptied the remaining contents of the last bucket on a board and slid it toward him.

After due deliberation, from a polite distance, Doc inhaled a sniff of the steaming mixture. His cultured nose informed him that a combination of spoiled bacon, dried salmon and ancient cornmeal was no titbit for a proper dog. He backed away, drew up one foot artistically and straightened his tail.

The dog-tender shot his lash among the quarreling dogs with resultant howls, kicked a bullying malemiut, then jerked about as he glimpsed Doc's beauty pose. His storm-drawn face relaxed to a grin. He spat on the ground emphatically, remarked, "Oh, ——!" and climbed the fence.

There was much sneaking up, dodging back and furtive, sidelong watching of the setter before the boldest of the huskies fell upon Doc's supper and demolished it in mighty gulps. The wild dogs confronted Doc in a perplexed semicircle, running out their red tongues, moving restlessly on their pads, completely mystified. In husky code a dog that wouldn't scrap for his food was an amazing riddle.

Maintaining his haughtiness, Doc literally stared the trace-dogs out of countenance. Disconcerted, one by one, tails low, they slipped shamefacedly away, the puzzle of the chechako dog too proud to fight still unsolved.

By dark a frozen mist blew across Linn Canal. Red Doc was still waiting to be put to bed when a shadow slipped into the corral. Noiselessly the figure moved across the yard. Low, snarling complaints came from the huskies and a muttered:

"Your hides are thicker than mine. I got to have this box. Get out, Fidos. Shake a leg."

Over-ending the box to the corner where Doc shivered disconsolately, the newcomer adjusted its open side to the fence where it was boarded tight.

Doc observed the man pack blankets, a liberal square of canvas cooking-utensils, a forty-four carbine and supplies into the box. Not until the deserter had slipped under the canvas did he recognize the presence of Doc. He called the dog, and Doc accepted the shelter with as much evidence of gratitude as could be expected of a pampered dog who had never known the meaning of friendship.

To Red Doc this was a jangled world where men lived in boxes with dogs. For three days the man shared food and shelter with Doc, and he began to experience his first sense of companionship. The body scent of the man thrilled Doc pleasantly; and he talked to Doc as he would have talked to another man. Red Doc did not understand the words; he knew from the voice inflection the man's friendship as well as his constant dread of discovery.

Two days Doc nose-felt the air and listened expectantly; the man had dropped from sight as stealthily as he had appeared.

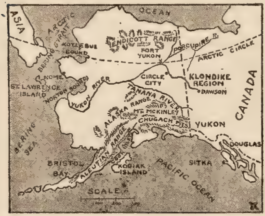
A day later Doc looked out upon the snow-filled chasms of Chilcoot Divide, whose waters drop west into the Pacific and flow northward two thousand miles by lakes and the mighty Yukon, past the gold-sands of the Klondike on to the waters of Bering Sea.

With a score of bickering, howling dogs, savages all of them, Doc found himself aboard a stern-wheel steamer headed north through Bennett, Tagish and Marsh for White Horse Rapids; the beginning of river navigation and the Yukon Winter trail for Dawson City.

With six Alaska trail-dogs Doc was chained to a stanchion on the lower deck. He had gradually accustomed himself to the scent of the wild rabble, though he kept his chain-length from them. His shoulders and hips bore the red streaks of scoring teeth.

Slashed by teeth, half-starved and herded with lash in a land of fang and whip, his life had suddenly become a perpetual fight.

A new use for scent and hearing was Doc's first lesson of the wild. Men and dogs began telling his nose and ears who and what they were as he had never needed to know in his kennel life. In self-defense he tested every approach, learning that man and dogs have a vocabulary, not of spoken words but of varying inflection tones and quality smells, betraying character and temper even as to their thought and purposes.



At the sound of a familiar voice Doc raised his head from the deck to recognize Price. He had not caught scent or hearing of him since landing from the *Tacoma*.

"That's the —— blue-blood."

Price reeled out a string of oaths with a sweep of his arm, indicating Doc to the man beside him.

Doc caught the smell of liquor. The burly man he called Bergman wavered unsteadily as he approached.

"Did you ever see a pedigreed dog, or man either, that was worth a rap?" Price emitted between puffs of a black cigar. "One of these Indian dogs could chew him to death and pull him off his feet."

He clapped Bergman familiarly on the shoulder.

Bergman stood twining a long lash around the handle of a dog-whip, regarding Doc through slit eyes.

"I know a lot of Nu-yaw-kas," continued Price, "and blue-nosed Yankees with pedigrees running back to the Revolution and the *Mayflower*. 'First families,' you know; and they are all a soft lot."

Price leaned heavily against a stanchion.

"My old man saved the dough; that's the only pedigree he had. It don't matter how you got it or where, a good long bank account is the only thing anybody respects. Bergman, do you think you could make a sled-dog out of him? You'll have to make him over if you do."

With nose flattened between his paws and unblinking eyes Red Doc inspected the short-necked, narrow-shouldered Bergman. Without removing his eyes from the two men he circled away to the full limit of the chain. He did not cower, but retired with a conscious deliberation that plainly said—

"I don't enjoy the smell or the sight of either one of you."

Irritated by this move, Price caught the chain and jerked Doc toward him, and to his further exasperation Doc did not resist his repeated yanking.

"Needs to know who's his boss, that's all," grunted Bergman.

He stepped to where the dog lay, his body stretched along the deck. With a quick jab he thrust the heavy handle of his whip under Doc's chin and jerked his head from the floor.

"Get up, you blue-blooded dude."

He snarled epithets common to the type of brutal dog mushers in the North.

Slowly Doc got to his feet and with eyes fixed on Bergman backed away.

For a moment the half-drunken Bergman lowered over the passive but unfearing dog, then with the whip-handle began roughly cuffing and punching him about the head.

Doc did not avoid the blows, and Bergman worked himself into a fury, multiplying blows and vicious jabs until he was swinging the whip at arm's length. He banged the dog at the end of the chain across the eyes and over the nose with all his strength.

His nose dripping blood, Doc faced the man but did not show his teeth or utter a sound.

With a quick jab Bergman drove the end of the handle inside Doc's cheek, prying out with a violent twist that brought a spurt of blood.

The trace dogs chained to the same post sat on their haunches whining, or, circling suddenly, twisted and jerked desperately in their collars to get farther away.

"Take that—and that! How do you like it, you high-toned pup?" Bergman exploded through his teeth. "I'll make you yap like a cur."

Price stood with a contemptuous if not gratified smile watching the dog-baiting.

A loop of the tightly wound whip-lash loosened out, and Bergman brought it repeadedly over Doc's back with the full strength of his thick arm. There was a sudden flash of shining teeth, and the whip leaped from Bergman's clutch. Doc's ivory fangs clipped together again and again. With a slash he cut the thong attaching the lash. He seized the handle, biting and crunching it between his powerful jaws, then spat the tooth-marred handle on the deck. With head low he stood pointing at the hateful object. Bergman dodged heavily aside, but when Doc did not attack, cautiously kicked the whip beyond his reach.

With bruised head and mutilated lips Doc could not understand what it all meant. Unwhimpering, the hair on his back bristling, his nose followed the whip-handle as if he expected it to leap at him again. Reeling, sickened, he dropped to the deck and through blood-filmed eyes watched Bergman and Price walk away.

At the lower end of the lakes and the head of the dreaded box cañon to the White Horse, Doc was led ashore. With the six native dogs he was turned loose to shift for himself. Through driving snow and wind that cut like a hot knife, sick from the beating, he groped for shelter. Four of the team curled up in the lee of a stack of freight, their threatening snarls warning Doc away.

It was steadily growing colder. Exhausted but persistent, at last he crept under an overhanging cliff, and, pawing away débris, made a well-protected bed.

Muffled to the nose and weighted with clothing, Price cursed the cold, the country and Bergman—the latter struggling vainly in the bitter gale to pitch a tent while Price issued impossible orders or helplessly looked on. At dark they gave up the attempt to make camp, plodding down the river to put up with other trailers.

With a single dried fish to appease his hunger Doc slept fitfully. In the night he was aware of a furry warmth crowding in to his bed, but he was too drowsy to investigate the friendly, inquiring whines.

IN THE morning he was awakened by the clinging tongue of his visitor on his swollen muzzle and flayed back. It was afternoon before Doc could discern through bloodshot eyes the silver-gray of the big malemiut who had returned repeatedly to administer the first aid of her healing tongue to his wounds. It was Skookum, one of the team whose maternal instincts had caused her to befriend Doc.

Skookum's face was scarred with the slashing of many fights. One of her pricked-up ears, shorn off ragged by sharp teeth, added a comical one-sided jauntiness to the wide face. She caressed Doc as if he were a helpless puppy, and her body scent told him of her strange attachment.

Doc was thin-flanked and scarcely able to cripple along when he crawled from his nest and followed the wolf-like Skookum toward the camp which Bergman and Price had succeeded in making. Twice she stopped to apply her tongue to his wounds. Doc, hunkering down, nose in air, accepted her attentions with dignified gratitude.

At feeding-time Skookum gave the team to understand that she had taken charge of Red Doc. Jealous, incorrigible fighter that she was, one deep-throated warning was sufficient to discourage liberties with Doc's supper of rice, tallow and fish.

In a few days Bergman lined the team up for the first trip to White Horse. All but Doc were native trailers. Tin Can, a beady-eyed, half-blood Spitz, led the team; two long-legged, short-haired huskies with bobbed tails followed; Doc was harnessed ahead of Skookum; and two broad-backed malemiuts, Nig and Minook, worked next the sled.

Fifteen hundred pounds were packed on sled and trailer. Relaying to a camp below White Horse, Doc grew stiff with the unacustomed toil; he suffered too from the inexcusable punishment of Bergman's whip. There was an eagerness animating the team that imparted itself to Doc. The work was hard; but it was the only activity in his vapid, useless life that he had ever faced with anything but unconcern.

With the days his wonderfully formed body grew hard. He could eat anything, and the work in the open called on every latent faculty.

On the way to Lake La Barge Price's loud-mouthed orders to Bergman, with an occasional kick and curse as he passed the team, reminded Doc of his presence. They halted at the head of the lake while both men lay drunk in camp, the team going unfed. Here a delightful experience came to Red Doc.

Hungry and restless during the night and without food in the morning, Doc followed Skookum into the woods. True to her wild breed, Skookum began traveling straight into the wind, nose-searching for game.

Doc's faculties of scent and hearing had grown keen with his life in the open. Ranging beside the low-running malemiut, Doc was at first mystified; then trail odors of wild life began coming to his fine scent. For a time he charged aimlessly back and forth, circling about Skookum; then the heritage of his Irish setter blood, the call of generations of hunters, electrified him. Beneath dark spruces, across bottoms and marshes, the silent places became articulate with life. A new world of impelling, enticing game scents thrilled him for the first time until his heart beat wildly and he shook with eagerness.

He forgot the wolf-dog beside him and began racing at full speed across the wind in wide, progressing folds, his nose so keen that his head was never lowered. To keep pace with the red, darting shadow, covering fifty yards to either side, Skookum traveled a straight course, searching the ground with her nose.

Over and under windfalls, through dense brush, spruce thickets and patches of marsh Red Doc did not pause, obeying the never before experienced urge of the hunt in his blood. He coursed a half-mile, knowing every living thing that had passed.

Then, far ahead of Skookum, drawn by a warm trail, he suddenly jerked to a dead stop. He could not have told why he did it or why he remained in that crouching position. He held low, belly to the snow, as a thousand untrained progenitors had done. His head was drawn to one side, his nose straight to the thrilling scent. He was motionless as marble.

Skookum saw the strange, silent pose of the setter and slowed her pace as she circled in. She now caught the fresh game odor. Nearer, inch by inch, cat-footed, she drew. She saw the beady eyes and the outline of a ptarmigan against the snow. Doc held his crouching point.

The cunning of the kill was in Skookum's blood as the strange pointing instinct was in Doc's. Closer she crept; then, drawing low, she sprang high and far out, her paws striking down on beating wings.

They feasted together. That day Red Doc, the new-born hunter, pointed rabbits, spruce hens, and even a martin hiding under a root.

A new world had come to life for Red Doc. In harness or about camp, with deep, inhaling breaths he searched the air for game. His blood leaped to the joy of achievement, reflecting itself in the power and energy of his stalwart body.

THEY covered the forty-mile length of La Barge on solid ice. The second day, trailing beside the open river where it ran swift, a quarrel between Price and his dog-driver resulted in Bergman's quitting and proceeding on down the river alone. Price had accused Bergman of stealing, and drinking from a case of liquor on the trailer. The dog musher charged Price with "skinning" him out of fifty dollars in a poker game. Peeling a hundred-dollar bill from a conspicuous roll, Price paid Bergman his wages to the accompaniment of much profanity.

For Doc and his team-mates there ensued days of toil and danger, multiplied by the incompetency of Price. They made miserable camps, went unfed, broke through flood-ice, froze their feet and endured merciless clubbings when he forced them over ice-bridges and across thin places where he dared not go ahead. Doc quickly learned the tricks of the trail and readily sensed danger spots where human deductions would have failed.

On a bitter day between the Hootlinqua and Big Salmon they had twisted and turned, crossing and recrossing the river only to be turned back again before they found a way on between upturned ice-floes. Either shore was precipitous.

The almost obliterated trail led toward a frowning bluff in an elbow crook of the river. Here the water dashed sharply inshore, and a narrow strip of rim-ice had formed between the cliff and the swift open water. The trail climbed up and around the steep hill, swinging back to safe going below the sharp bend.

The team utterly refused to travel on the glare ice along the foot of the cliff. Compelled to take the detour over the hill and to make two trips, Price hooked the team to the trailer first.

He found signs of a Summer trail leading along the face of the bluff some fifty feet above the river. It was untraveled, but looked as if it might be a short cut around.

With difficulty he forced the team along this second, and apparently wider, shelf of the two dim trails. He did not go ahead to investigate.

He had not gone far when the ledge narrowed, and the reluctant dogs began creeping close to the inside wall and peering fearfully down. Price relinquished the gee pole in front of the sled and, walking behind, forced the team on.

The Spitz leader hugged the inside of the narrow trail, crying as if he were being whipped. The broad-backed wheel dog, Minook, understanding what was expected of him in a tight place, threw his weight and strength toward the bank, holding the front end of the sled-nose in, while the back end slued out over space repeatedly.

Striking an ice-crusted patch of snow, where the trail bent and slanted outward, the dogs clawed desperately to swing the sled safely across the danger point. With a trailing-rope Price could have kept the sled from swinging.

Suddenly with a yelping cry from Minook the sled slued sidewise on the slope, carrying Minook off his feet. It shot out into space, whirling over on end and jerking the clawing, yelping dogs with it.

The sled struck on the narrow shelf below. The team, landing on top of the load, went sprawling down and hung, clawing and yelping in the tangled harness over the sheer drop to the ice.

White-faced and cursing horribly, Price peered down from above in time to see the up-ended sled suddenly jump outward. There was a crash and cry as sled and dogs struck the ice. The trailer shot out across the glassy surface into the black, engulfing current.

Tin Can, freed from the harness, still crying, was safe at the foot of the rocks. The two huskies next the leader were underneath and sustained the shock of the fall. Nig, Minook and Skookum were clawing on the smooth ice, trailing a splintered sled runner in toward the face of the cliff. The huskies and Red Doc, swept on in front of the sled, had disappeared.

With head and shoulders high out of the icy water, Doc came up alone in the swirling current fifty yards down stream. Where he swam the resistless undercurrent set straight inshore for the edge of the ice.

Sensing the power of the undercurrent that would draw him beneath, Doc suddenly turned and swam desperately for the opposite side. Breasting up-stream, he fought to win the ice where the current ran nearly parallel to the edge, before he should be borne down and sucked under. Artfully he quartered the stream, the current helping to sheer him across. He held his own, swimming powerfully, then struck the ice.

Repeatedly he struggled to lift himself up, but the frozen slush ice that had piled on the surface at the edge of the ice confronted him like a wall. Always slipping back into the gripping current, he would hold himself up with one paw on the ice; then, flinging himself clear, he fought a foot at a time up-stream. The edge proved too thick for him to claw his way out, and for a time Doc rested his paws on the ice waiting for help.

Price held the remaining dogs and watched Doc as he won across the open water. His face was ashen, and he shook until his teeth chattered. For a moment he observed the heavier ice on the opposite side; then without a glance in the direction of the great-hearted dog, fighting for his life, clinging there in the icy stream, he hooked the four dogs to the sled and started for a cabin up-river.

BENEATH low-hanging spruces where the detour trail over the hill swung back to the river a man warmed by a small camp-fire.

He was wrapped in a blanket. Beside him was a crudely made toboggan, and beyond the fire a canvas shelter. About and in the fire a dozen or more lava rocks were heating. His brief arctic experience had taught Roger Clark many things—among them, the warmth of heated rocks on a cold night when one is without tent or stove.

As he sipped tea by the fire a strange cry filtered to him, coming up the wind. An hour before he had heard the yelp of dogs, but no teams had passed on the trail.

Again he heard the distress cry, more clearly this time. Drawing the blanket close, he picked his way to a high crest of ice, and gazed out over the frozen stream. He caught the entreating note again, this time from the ice ridges across and up the river.

Circling down from the open water and crossing the glare ice where the current rumbled close beneath, he mounted a huge jam. Near the open water he glimpsed a dark, moving object.

He had made his way up-stream but a short distance when almost at his feet appeared the figure of a big dog. He followed it as it disappeared in the jumbled ice-piles toward the middle of the river. Turning a high shoulder of upturned floes, he saw the dog with its head drooping low, standing over a dark inert heap on the ice. The dog, a malemiut as large as a full-grown wolf, lifted its muzzle toward the gray sky, its heart-aching call echoed once and the dog vanished as Clark approached.

WHEN Red Doc awoke he was aware of firelight dancing in his eyes, but the fire gave out no heat. He was strangely numb. Pitched to the tones of unutterable compassion, a voice sounded far away.

The spark of life flickered and dimmed; then again he wakened. He saw the man more clearly—the fire that was cold, the low canvas shelter and the blanket upon which he lay. He seemed far away and yet present, as in the hunting-dreams of his kennel-pent life.

With increasing consciousness as from a great distance he saw himself flung out through space from the face of the cliff and engulfed in the blood-freezing current. Escaping the clutching maelstrom, his legs drove like pistons through the water as he fought along the edge of the ice for an opening in the barrier.

The cold bit at his heart. Clawing, holding, heaving up his body, his coat was iced with every plunge. Again and again he all but gained the surface. Numbed, every sensation of cold and pain gone, his feet torn and bleeding, the stubborn, fighting blood of Irish setter ancestors held on. The spirit of a hundred brave progenitors, stronger than death, without one drop of cur blood to yelp or yield, clutched and clawed and clung. At last, crawling, tottering, staggering, he was on the ice, and then there vibrated faintly to him the voice of Skookum, the wolf-dog, nose-searching up the wind.

Far into the night, the stars leaping fitfully in the frost, the chill coma gripping Doc yielded to Clark's rubbing and the warmth of the fire. Doc's scent memory announced the identity of Roger Clark. He knew that the man stood between him and the numbing death. Clark's manipulating hands, his scent and voice tones, told the dog vastly more than a man's faculties could have comprehended.

In the morning he was awakened by Clark's movement about the camp. He struggled clear of blanket and canvas, and as he became aware of Clark's presence the miracle of his return to life came to him. He heard Clark's entreating—

"Come here; come on here, you poor red ——."

The words meant little, but the kindness of voice was irresistible. He thrust his nose against Clark's hand. His throat filled with unuttered sound; and, flattening himself, he began crying his gratitude, creeping toward the man who had saved him.

Suddenly all reserve fled. In one overwhelming flood of love-madness Doc cast himself upon Clark, caressing his hands, his feet, bounding up to reach his face, then, crouching flat, crying the pent-up hurt of his first awakening love for a man.

Not until then did Clark recognize Doc as the blue-blooded, apathetic dog of the *Tacoma* and his hiding-place in the dog corral, those first days at Skagway. Clark sat a long time talking to the dog while Doc's eyes dwelt on every changing expression and feature.

"You big red dog, you are a thoroughbred or you'd never made it."

Clark shook Doc's muzzle in the grip of his hand.

"It was in your blood to get out or die trying; a cur never would have made it. But there's no use trying to temper pewter; did you ever hear that, sir? Pewter won't take an edge; it's only steel that can stand hammering and fire," he added reflectively.

After a moment's silence Clark dropped his head upon his hand, and when he gazed again into Doc's inquiring eyes there were humiliation and regret graven in every line of his face.

"Roger Clark, Fugitive. Namesake of Illustrious Pioneer Fighter," Clark quoted slowly as if reading the headlines of a paper. "Red boy, blood counts in dogs and trotters. I wonder if it does in men?"

He shook his head gravely at Doc.

As no one passed or appeared to claim the dog, Clark trailed up the river that afternoon, talking to Doc as he traveled.

"You would make a great pal. This is a land for thoroughbreds."

He glanced down at Doc, nose close on his heels.

"I'm going to show them that blood will tell," he went on. "I want a chance, that's all; do you understand, boy? No penitentiary mortgage on my life! A man couldn't live down a pen record in seven lifetimes."

Doc dodged by him. Up the trail he raced; then, suddenly turning, he planted himself squarely in the path, paws outstretched, waiting with laughing tongue and eyes. Clark squatted on the trail; and Doc, spacing his red paws gingerly, slowly came to him.

Laughing at the dog's comical gravity, with a sudden swoop Clark caught Doc in his arms, tumbling him over and over in the snow and wrestling him down with simulated severity. Doc came up quivering, his heart pounding and body twisting with the ecstasy of his first frolic.

CLARK sighted smoke above the cabin where Price had stopped, but Doc's nose was more revealing; he was aware of the presence of his team-mates at the cabin a half-mile distant. As they topped the river-bank Price hailed them, and before Clark could reply he blurted:

"That's my dog. Where did you get him?"

To his bellowed, "Come here!" Doc stiffened stock-still beside Clark's leg, his lips drawing back from his teeth, the hair on his shoulders bunching.

Doc and Skookum touched noses, and Clark recognized the big malemiut to whose cry he had been drawn, and who had so strangely disappeared at his approach. At the end of an hour's parley with Price, Clark was all but coerced into taking Bergman's place as dog-musher for the trip to Dawson.

Price had immediately recognized Clark as the stoker aboard the *Tacoma,* and had quickly elicited the fact that he was traveling without sufficient outfit to be permitted in the country. Clark gave Price the name of John Matthews, an *alias* he had used since slipping across the border.

"Oh, never mind about your name," rejoined Price. "One name is just as good as another in this cursed, frozen country."

Price's cold, insinuating grin became an accusing leer.

"I think I've seen you in the East, and if I did you wasn't wearing the name of Matthews at that time. I'll call you by that handle until I've a mind to tell you who I think you are."

Could it be possible that Price had recognized him and knew of his defalcations, and that he might be apprehended even here? There seemed no way out but to go on with him now.

They were three days—days of cold at fifty below—to the Big Salmon. Price was impractical and arrogant, and from the first day persisted in his overbearing attitude, every bullying imposition an implied threat to turn Clark over to the police.

A wonderful life began unfolding in Red Doc. The wild adventure of the hunt sang in his setter blood, and now the love of a man joyously enslaved him. Cold and trail and the raw open only made life run more swiftly.

He did not like Clark to get out of his sight. In the night he often nosed the tent to assure himself of Clark's presence. When Clark touched him or spoke to him he was wildly happy; but for the most part his love found expression in a waving red flag and quiet adoration shining in his eyes.

Roger Clark too, in his fears and discouragements as well as in his braver moments of purpose to make good for the wrongs of the past, found resolution in the love and courageous example of Red Doc, whose every drop of blood leaped to the exigencies of toil, cold and danger.

The second morning below the Salmon, Price tried to whip the team into breaking out the sled before Clark took the gee-pole. Angered, he aimed a kick at Red Doc, who promptly retaliated by slashing his leg. He made for Doc with a club, but Clark interfered. Price whipped out his gun, and, raging like a lunatic, threatened to shoot first Clark and then the dog. He was leveling the gun at Doc when Clark with a swift leap kicked it spinning as the report crashed in the dead silence.

"I'll break you for that if it's the last thing I do in this frost-bitten, God-forsaken country!" Price cried, and turned a sneering face. "I'll put you in the pen; that's where you belong," he raged. "I know you, Clark; that's your name! That's a —— of a fine blue-blooded name!"

He piled up epithets.

"Oh, I got you dead to rights," he added.

His fury lighted up anew when Clark shrank back as if struck.

"I know you—I'll tell you now; I didn't

intend to do it until I got you safe in Dawson," Price went on. "When you told me your name was Matthews I knew I'd seen your mug in the papers and that wasn't your name. Why—you—you——"

He stuttered apoplectically.

"You skipped out and left ten thousand for your folks to square. You're a grandson of a pioneer!"

He spat vulgar imprecations on Clark and his family.

"You're a thief—that's what you are—a pedigreed thief. Gambled with your employer's money and got caught."

Snatching up a spruce limb, Clark made for his accuser.

"Take that back."

His voice rang clear.

"You cheap grafter, I'll brain you!"

Clark hesitated, club poised, as a flash of changing expression came into Price's contorted face and wildly glaring eyes.

"Hold on there! What are you doing? Put down that club!"

A man in a caribou parka whirled Clark by the shoulder.

Price relieved the tension with a harsh, hysterical laugh.

"That's all right. My partner here, got out of bed on the wrong side this morning."

His mirthless laugh echoed again.

"He'll be all right when we hit the trail."

The mail-carrier, on the relay from La Barge to Fort Selkirk, seemed to have materialized out of space.

As carrier and team disappeared down the trail, Price turned, and to Clark's astonishment apologized for his threats. Repeatedly he assured Clark that he had meant no harm and had no intention to make him trouble with the Mounted Police or to divulge his name. A strange change seemed to have struck Price.

"Let's build a fire and warm up," Price proposed. "It's so cold my heart is squeaking."

His face was gray.

"I don't care what you have done; just help me on to Dawson City and get me out of this cold. If I had a drink to warm me, I'd be all right."

Scuffing aside the snow, he rubbed the frost from the revolver as he picked it up. It was an old-style gun with his initials cut in the silver mounting. Shivering with the cold and with nervousness, Price cursed the river, his luck, and the loss of his case of liquor.

"Here, keep the thing."

He flung the revolver on top of the load.

"I'm afraid of it," he added. "You can have it; this cold is getting me."

He brushed a hand across his forehead as if it were difficult to see."

"Put the gun away—put it away—put it away!" he fairly shouted. "My nerves are jumpy—I might hurt myself or somebody."

His eyes were wide with an impenetrable stare.

BEFORE they had reached the Little Salmon the dogs sensed the mysterious change that had come over Price. At his approach they backed apprehensively away. Red Doc knew that the active, varying scent of men when awake and walking about all but ceased when they slept; but he was fearful of this confusing, ghostly something he detected in Price.

Every move in camp and on the trail was now referred to Clark. Price grew increasingly fearful of river travel, stopping and cursing at every report of the cracking ice. The distant howling of wolves robbed him of sleep. He was breaking under the strain of climate and trail. He was constantly afraid of freezing to death and compelled Clark to stop and build fires on the trail.

In a wooded bend of the river above Five Fingers they made camp in a vacant cabin that Clark had discovered in the timber a quarter of a mile from the river trail.

During the day they had met several outfits from whom Price had procured liquor. The mail carrier out-tripping to La Barge gave them the latest news of the gold-zone on the Klondike, passing them an hour before they made camp in the timber.

A crudely printed sign on the cabin designated the place as "Otter Spring Camp." Some fifty yards from the cabin they found an open fireplace formed by a ring of rocks, where they cooked dog-feed.

In the morning Price, warmed by a few drinks, decided that they would remain in camp for the day.

"Rest and wash up," he explained.

To Red Doc's bounding delight Clark took him for a hunt on a partially timbered flat across the river.

Clark was repeatedly amazed at Doc's wonderful power of scent, often pulling him a hundred yards from fresh trails straight to hiding ptarmigan or rabbit. It was difficult to restrain the dog on a fresh trail; but Doc soon discovered that the hunting faculties of hearing and smelling were totally lacking in the man, and that he must not range too far away.

A score of times he stood on a point beyond Clark's sight, waiting for him. Skookum would have scented his position immediately; but this man-god simply had no nose for hunting.

In mid-afternoon they stopped on a bench five hundred feet above the river. The air was redolent with the odor of spruce. The land of adventure lay just "over there," beyond the range.

The unknown called to Roger Clark and Red Doc. Their eyes searched across the piled, ribbed, cañoned stretches and up until they rested in the purple hazes of mystery, where clouds like ragged garments streamed across the peaks.

Doc tucked his nose under Clark's arm, whining and trembling.

"I wonder what is over there?"

Clark's arm circled out.

"Would you like to go?"

He understood the eagerness of the dog.

Doc lifted his head, gazed long before them, then, waving his red flag, voiced an echoing response to the lure of the wilderness.

"Doc, boy, we are all alike."

Clark's voice was reverent with the beauty and urge of it all.

"We'll go some day where no one has ever gone before. This is the last West. It's the blood call, Doc."

Neither he nor Doc could have told what they said to each other there. They loved the wilderness, untouched by the hand of man. They were the breed the North calls to herself.

PRICE was waiting at the landing. If the inexplicable change of front in Price and his fear of the cold had suggested doubts of his sanity, the change of plan he announced was even more puzzling to Clark.

"There will be two mounted police teams along here in a few days," he explained. "If I go on to Dawson I will hire them to take me through."

On the way through the timber to the cabin Price cursed himself for having undertaken the trip to Dawson. A fatalistic impression of death by accident or the cold had settled on him. There was poignant distress in his face, grown lean and ashen in a few days. The cold and silent vastness had completely unnerved him, and further travel down the river assumed fatal possibilities in his imagination.

On the following morning he proposed that Clark repair an old sled, on a cache near the cabin, take what provisions he could haul and go on to Dawson. He refused to accept pay for the outfit and offered Clark every assistance he could give him.

"What about Doc? Are you going to sell the team?"

Clark could not conceal his unwillingness to leave the dog.

"You had better keep him, Clark. I don't need a dog, and Doc and I don't understand each other. We don't hitch; never did. I've always hated his high-toned ways. If I should ever want him I can find you in Dawson."

"If I went away without him, Price, I'd miss him every moment. It will mean a great deal for me to have him."

Clark's face flushed embarrassment at the confession.

Hesitating a moment, Clark studied the gloomy countenance opposite him.

"I'll tell you, Price, even Doc makes me ashamed of myself. I had the best chance in the world; and when the pinch came I flunked like a mongrel. I've broke my father and robbed my sister. That dog would die before he'd yelp or quit, and I ought to have as much sand as he has."

A blaze of light in Clark's eyes bored into the other's deflected visage.

"I'm going straight in the future," he added, "and I'll pay you for everything you are doing for me."

There was a vicious tingle in the air when Price accompanied Clark and Doc as far as the river the next morning. The last glimpse Roger Clark had of Price was as a distant speck on the river bank waving them a farewell high-sign. Doc suddenly halted on the trail, ears pricked; he had caught the parting wolf-cry of Skookum at the cabin.

In three hours they skirted the wall of water, divided and flung, writhing, twisting, hissing between the Five Fingers. A load rolled from Clark as he put miles behind him. The conduct of Price was so strange that he did not believe he was to be trusted.

The cold, the desolation, the tremendous scale of the land stirred Clark's blood to conquest; and Red Doc, toiling in the traces, participated in the splendid, dominating recklessness.

The great river began broadening; the trail improved. Unrolling before them was an endless panorama of spruce, birch and cottonwoods. On either hand the flats widened; and valleys appeared between the white, glittering heights. There was but one disturbing thought—the inexorable efficiency of the Royal Mounted Police, if they should be sent upon his trail.

"So it's your opinion, red boy, that we'll camp daytimes and trail by moonlight. You are entirely correct in your deductions, my red-tailed friend."

Throughout a solemn, pompous council one noon Red Doc had crouched content beside the fire, occasionally lifting inquiring eyes to Clark's whimsical face as he talked.

As if aware of his purpose, when they came to a trail leading off the river that Clark had observed at a distance, Doc pulled into the turn. Many times afterward Clark tested this strange telepathic sense conveying even his thoughts to the dog. Eight times out of ten Doc would divine his intention. When Clark was undecided which way the trail lay or the turn to make, Doc would often halt confused, looking over his shoulder as if saying—

"Well, why don't you make up your mind?"

In three nights they made sixty miles—half the distance from the mouth of the Pelly to Stewart River. The weather had softened when they pulled up at the mouth of a small stream after daylight, making camp well back from the Yukon.

Remaining in camp that night, Clark and Doc traveled up the creek hunting, in the morning. They had found game plentiful along the river. This was the sport Doc lived for every moment in the open. The creeping, spying, scouting through the woods for game life was indescribably exciting, and he was aware of his superiority in the hunt. Wide-eyed, open-eared, solving the tricks of the wild, he read the signs and sounds of the woods as his man-god would have read a book. He had learned many things since that first hunt with Skookum; and Clark, watching Doc, too had learned.

After several miles travel up-stream, beneath heavy spruces, they came out into a rolling country, half willow flats and scrub timber. After hunting across a wide stretch of willows and marshy spaces, Red Doc stiffened to a crouching point, his hackle standing, and as if stalking he crept forward a few rods. He waited for Clark and repeated the unusual maneuver. After a few moves Clark was certain that Doc had scented big game.

They moved forward across a tangle of down birch and spruce. Here Doc came to a full point. Crawling noiselessly on, after a long inspection of the open space before them, Clark stood beside the crouching red statue.

"Well, red boy," he whispered, "this is one on you, I guess."

When Doc did not budge, Clark slipped forward. A little to one side and beyond, his eye caught the green and white of newly cropped willows. Crouching low, his heart thumped in his ears to the thought of the only big game in the North the sign could indicate.

A few feet away he found the snow punched with moose tracks. The great animal was feeding across the wind. Clark had never killed game larger than a lynx, which Doc had rushed, snarling and spitting, up a tree. The vast white silence seemed an oppressive weight; he found himself trembling.

The thought that the moose was possibly within sight and that he might make the wrong move unnerved him. Crouching low, he returned to where Doc stood, and, securing him by a thong, crept back into the head of a draw.

If he could but make the kill it might go a long way toward helping him on to Dawson. He straddled a windfall until he was sure that the racing tumult of his heart had ceased. After rummaging his mind for a single scrap of information concerning moose-hunting or stalking big game he gave up the problem, remarking under his breath:

"Doc, we are sure up against it. I guess we'll just blunder ahead on his trail and trust to luck."

Doc whimpered, lifting first one paw then the other, gazing into Clark's face, then faced into the wind, his hackle rising.

"I'll leave it all to you, Doc. You have a nose, and I'll just follow along."

He laughed at the simplicity of the scheme.

He led Doc back to the track. The wind was sufficiently noisy to cover cautious movements and would carry the body scent of the moose a long distance. Doc's hunting was to bring Clark to within striking distance. He understood that part of the game; it was in his blood. Doc shivered with the strange odor and could not keep down his hackle or suppress a snarl when he thrust his muzzle into the heavy-scented moose tracks.

They had followed on the fresh trail across the wind less than a quarter of a mile when Doc halted. Though the tracks were plain and straight on he refused to lead ahead.

The country before them was clear but for clumps of willow, and Clark could see no good reason for stopping. He continued cautiously on the moose trail, while Doc with many questioning pauses reluctantly followed at his heels. Regarding the dog a moment, Clark stopped, realizing that he had assumed the place of hunter and that Doc's hunting sense was warning him not to continue on the tracks.

"This won't do, I'll get into trouble sure," he whispered.

He back-tracked to the spot where Doc had first balked at leading ahead.

"Now, red boy, what's on your mind?" he encouraged. "Go ahead on your own hook; you're doing this."

Doc began working back and forth on the trail uncertainly for a time, inhaling deeply up the wind. Suddenly he turned at a right angle from the tracks, facing into the wind. He balanced himself on top of a windfall for a few moments, scenting the air; then as if fully satisfied he worked cautiously forward directly away from the trail.

After traveling a hundred yards Doc came to a point. Clark crept forward to investigate, discovering tracks where the moose had cunningly doubled back. He had quartered down the wind in such a way that anything following on his trail would have been discovered to his scent or keen hearing from up the wind.

It was some time before Clark could figure out the wary movement, and then only when he had sketched out the back-circle the animal must have traveled. As the moose fed this way, he was completely guarded from surprize in the rear so long as the wind remained in that quarter.

Clark understood now that Doc had caught the trail scent in the wind or that his hunting instinct had in some way anticipated the doubling rear-guarding tactics.

Three times Doc led in short cuts across to back tracks, straight into the wind. They seldom followed the moose tracks more than a few rods. At times Doc tugged eagerly at the leash, while Clark, crouching low, slipped shadow-like from one sheltering bunch of timber to another.

Doc halted in a maze of down timber; then, working out to one edge of the mass of windfall, he led up a willow ridge, coming to a point as they reached the level. Every hair on his back stood, his lips lifting away from his shining fangs as he caught a warm body scent. Crouching low, he seemed frozen to the spot.

Clark crept on ahead to a down spruce and pushed his head up until his eyes were on a level with the top of the trunk. On the edge of a willow flat, less than a hundred yards distant, broadside to him, stood the giant of the North. His huge head and palmed antlers were so mighty that he seemed like some frightful prehistoric creature.

Repeatedly Clark picked the vulnerable spot through the sights of his carbine. His every movement seemed painfully deliberate. Oddly he noticed a willow branch caught and hanging across the broad back. He waited an age for one foreleg to move forward. The flat crack of the forty-four seemed insignificant. The shot went true; low behind the fore shoulder.

Doc furtively followed Clark at a distance toward the gray, inert object in the open. He was so agitated by the hot, wild odor that he would not, at first, come near. Clark found himself shaking with suppressed excitement.

In two hours they had covered a little more than a mile. It was a two-hour lesson in the art and patience of big-game hunting that Clark would never forget. Here was meat to the value of eight hundred dollars or more in Dawson City. Clark hugged Red Doc, lavishing on him every fantastic name he could think of, realizing—novice that he was—that the credit of the hunt belonged to him.

The chance moose hunt was the beginning of four profitable months of hunting for the Dawson market. Even with added experience their big-game hunting varied but slightly from that first stalk and kill. They were fortunate in making two more kills of moose not far from the first one, within easy sledding distance of the Yukon trail.

Over a low pass into the valley of the White River, a hundred miles above its confluence with the Yukon, they killed moose, caribou and small game. Every day man and dog awoke to the blood throb of a new adventure on the threshold of a new world. The Northland tempered them to the tireless patience, hard toil and self-reliance of life that hunts its living food.

With but limited knowledge of woodcraft and its arts, Clark solved the problems of tanning hides, building camps, fashioning webs and skin clothing. The glamour of adventure led them far into untrodden places. Many times Clark could not have found his way out of the labyrinth of peaks, gorges and boundless stretches of timber but for Red Doc's sense of direction; more wonderful and unerring than the magnetic needle, guiding the way to camp or trail. They faced fierce blasts, toiled and struggled long hours down nameless streams, sledding to the river.

In camp Doc would sprawl for hours by the fire, vastly content, conscious of only one supreme fact in his life—the love and presence of Roger Clark. In the open, pitting scent, hearing and intelligence against the adroitness of predatory beast and heavy-hoofed monarch, Doc became a cunning, swift creature of the wild. He learned to leap in and kill, to take advantage of cover and wind.

There was no trouble to dispose of the meat on the Yukon to freighters sledding to Dawson. Fresh meat was worth any price they might ask in the gold-camps of the Klondike.

Only once did there occur an event to disturb the success of their venture. On the Yukon they met an officer of the Mounted Police—Sergeant Corey, who with notebook in hand requested the usual information of name, place and occupation. Again Clark gave the name of Matthews. The meeting with the police was the one possibility he feared every trip to the Yukon.

THE white silence had given way to the din of countless waters—to bursting, throbbing life in the land, and to the blaze of perpetual sunshine when Roger Clark and Red Doc arrived in Dawson City. Reluctantly they had turned from the scenes of their first freedom.

Doc was heavier by twenty pounds than when he played matinée idol at Madison Square bench shows. The might of the wilderness had transformed Clark into muscled erectness and had given him self-reliance such as he had never known before. His hopes were high, and the future was touched with the light of the arctic skies.

The second day after they had made camp with a fringe of tents above the mouth of the Klondike, Clark went into Dawson. For a month he had been writing scraps of his wonder-experiences in a letter to his sister. Red Doc had heard many times in the months gone by of that wonderful sister, who was "no quitter," to whose love and sacrifices Clark owed even a runaway chance to keep out of the penitentiary and who was working to have the case against him dismissed.

In the lines and between the lines the letter read:

> This is a free, new land where nothing counts but the iron in a man's blood. I am making good, and I am sure it will all come out right in the end. This is my country; I love it. They'll never brand me with the pen now.
>
> You can't even dream what the great country is like. How I want you to come and see its glory-skies and pictured woods, with streams that flow God only knows where.

There were pages and pages of word-pictures trying to describe the indescribable. Most of all he told of a new-found friend, to whose intelligence and courage he owed his every success.

> And, little sister mine, I want you to know him; you will some time. He is tall and handsome with brown eyes. He walks like a king, and he is as brave as a lion. I know you will fall in love with him, and I don't care if you do. A hundred times I have told him about you and everything we ever did.
>
> I am sending you three thousand dollars. It is all partnership money, but Doc—that is my partner's nickname—says that he won't have a cent until I have squared myself and made good.

A postscript read:

> Doc sends his best respects. This moment he is sitting by the fire, too full of caribou stew to talk.

The confusion of noises in Dawson hammered on Doc's delicate eardrums, and the reek of odors stifled his distinguishing sense of smells. Every moment he was fearful in town. He padded close on Clark's heels, or with his eyes fixed wistfully on Clark's face waited for the instant when they should return to their camp.

This dread communicated itself to Clark, who avoided the place as much as possible. In a few days Clark arranged to go out on Bonanza Creek to shovel in on the clean-up.

Along Bonanza Red Doc observed the frenzied haste of moiling lines of men—his idol one of them—shoveling like madmen from pyramids of earth into long strings of sluice-boxes. Every day he saw these mud-splashed toilers cleaning up piles of soft, bright nuggets and yellow dust, sacking their treasure in hundreds of pounds.

The run of water was over, and Red Doc found himself in harness again. This harness was a queer arrangement, half-pack and half-sled, the butt ends of peeled poles fastened on a back pad, with the slender tops dragging the ground and the load bound across the sagging support at his heels. It was mad joy to help again.

They packed and hauled up the Klondike to a high bench, where Clark had purchased ground. Here Clark toiled in an open cut during the long, sunlit days, while Red Doc pawed gravel at his feet or dreamily regarded his every movement from some mossy bank. Occasionally he helped pack supplies or hauled wood from the hillside above.

Clark did not venture into Dawson; the place oppressed him with a feeling of calamity. Again he wrote a happy missive to his sister, enclosing a remittance. He told her of his new fortune in opening pay in the hillside claim, urging her to write to him if it was safe to do so, or, better, to come to Dawson, and they would plan their future together. He did not forget to write a breezy, comical account of the doings of his friend Doc, concluding:

> Doc is growing very particular about his daily tubbings these days; early training, I guess. He tramps a mile down to the Klondike and back every day for a dip. He's president of the company now and runs the whole works.

It was immediately after dinner, on a day as gloriously transparent as the thirty preceding days had been, when Doc, with many turnings of his head toward Clark, plainly saying, "Foolish man, it's hot; why don't you come along?" disappeared toward the river.

What deadly thing was carried to him in the voice tones and odors of two men approaching at the foot of the hill he did not know. Many things were not clear to Doc, among them the undertone of hate or fear in voices and the emotional odors from men's bodies. Every hair along his spine involuntairly stood, growling uneasily he turned back up the hill.

The wind blew full in his face when he whirled about on the trail in sight of Clark. The menacing odor of the men was warm; he knew they were close at hand. He nosed Clark's hand, then trotted back, snarling along the break of the bench.

Slowly Doc came at Clark's command as two officers of the Mounted Police crossed the flat to the camp.

Doc's every sense was absorbed by what his discriminating ears and nose told him. He sensed danger, possibly death, to the one he loved; and he possessed no powers of reason to controvert the hostility of scent and sound pervading his faculties. He crouched flat beside Clark, muscles tensed for a rush.

He recognized Sergeant Corey. The other man wore a gun on his hip. Doc understood the meaning of a gun.

He did not comprehend the order for Clark's arrest; but the restrained passion and hostile lurking purpose in voice and every movement betrayed them. They were hunting Clark, as he, Doc, had stalked moose. This was the end of the chase; he read it in every secret move. In another moment they would leap at Clark, or the gun would spit death.

The man with the gun moved toward Clark. Doc saw the steel manacles in his hands, and Clark pushing them aside with protestations. Fearful, passion-crazed because of his great love, Doc rushed without a sound.

The man's eye caught the red apparition driving straight for his throat. His fangs sank deep in the man's upraised shoulder, the force of the drive bearing him to the ground.

Doc hurled himself on the man in a frenzy to destroy. Twice his teeth ripped at the man's arms and shoulder before he heeded Clark's commands:

"Doc! Down! Down, you Doc! Come here."

In a single bound, head low, eyes glaring, he crouched behind Clark.

In an instant the man was on his feet. Corey called Clark to hold the dog and warned his companion, Officer Seaver, to keep back; but Seaver came on, his hand dropping to his gun.

Doc saw. The gun was half-drawn; and before Clark could intervene Doc leaped in again. Doc's teeth ripped the man's arm to the wrist; the gun was knocked from his grasp.

Doc would have died then but for the incredible swiftness with which he darted behind Clark. Flashing another gun, Seaver had thrown a shot over Doc's back.

"Get out of the way there! I'll fix him!" he yelled.

Corey's gun bore on Clark.

Then love conquered Doc's fearing knowledge of guns. He lunged from between Clark's feet.

The gun roared.

"Don't shoot! Oh, my God, don't shoot him! He couldn't help it."

Clark was down with his arms around the infuriated dog, struggling to restrain him, and shielding him from the menacing gun with his body.

When he stood he clasped Doc under one shoulder and about the neck, holding him up against his body.

"For God's sake, men, I'll come. I'll come peaceably."

Clark's voice vibrated with horrified surprize.

"I didn't know he would fight," he added. "I'd rather serve twenty years than have him hurt."

He hugged Doc close, narrowly watching every move of the officer.

"What's all the trouble?"

Clark turned an agitated face to Sergeant Cory.

"I couldn't get away. I have enough dust to pay back every dollar if the money hasn't been returned."

He motioned toward the open cut in the bench.

"Money? What money?"

Sergeant Corey eyed him curiously.

"This is serious business, Clark. Don't try to run a bluff; it won't go. You had better come clean; you will feel better afterward. There are some things in the Yukon that can't be squared with money; you know what one of them is."

"I don't understand, sergeant. I want to square the whole business with the company and the surety people, but they ought to give a man a chance. How could a man live down a pen record?"

"Never mind the chance," Seaver interrupted. "There won't be any prison for you."

Blood streaming over Clark's hand told where Seaver's bullet had furrowed Doc's shoulder.

"Tie him up quick, or I'll shoot him," Seaver threatened.

"I'll tie him up."

Clark started toward the camp.

"Hold on there, you. None of that! Stop where you are!"

Seaver swung the gun, threatening dog and man.

Clark halted. Suddenly his eyes blazed indignation.

"If you shoot that dog again I'll kill you."

He whipped a spatter of blood from his hand.

"Do you hear? Turn that gun the other way," he raged. "The dog wasn't to blame— You'll shoot him, will you?"

Dragging Doc in one arm, he made toward the officer.

"Hide behind a gun! What do you want of a gun to take a man in a country like this?"

Leaping between them, Corey's cool-headed persuasion eased the situation.

After dressing Seaver's lacerated arm and taking possession of the camp, the sergeant cautioned Clark that any statement or admissions he might make could be used in evidence against him.

THAT night Red Doc began what was to prove a long vigil in front of the Mounted Police barracks in Dawson City. For seven joy-filled months Roger Clark had been life to him. All that preceded his coming was unreal. Hour after hour, those first long days when nights were but shadows of three hours' duration, Doc tirelessly stood at the doorway where Clark had passed from his sight.

He sensed calamity overshadowing Clark. He wanted to fight for him, to defend him; but he could not fight this intangible enemy. For weeks he did not eat; no one saw him sleep. He whined for Clark, but did not know that he whined. His hungry eyes entreated help of every man passing in or out of the barracks. He understood the sympathy of many, but knew their kindness was only for himself.

He permitted Sergeant Corey to dress his wound and found sympathy in him that was more than pity or admiration. But every hour his longing for Clark was like a sickness.

In the hands of the Mounted Police the law operated swiftly and surely. Standing before the court, Clark was smitten dumb when the indictment concluded—

> Roger Clark, you are hereby charged with the murder of one Franklin J. Price.

Price had been killed shortly after Clark was last seen with him at the Otter Spring camp. The body had not been discovered until the snow melted in the Spring.

Step by step Clark's furtive movements in the country were traced. He was a fugitive from justice, they had ascertained; and his threat to kill Seaver at the time of his arrest did not help his case.

The mail-carrier from Fort Selkirk testified to Clark's fight with Price and added that he met them afterward together near the death-camp at Otter Spring the last time Price was seen alive. Price's revolver in Clark's possession, together with Red Doc, camp equipment and conveniences in Clark's possession, were identified as having belonged to Price.

The evidence was overwhelming in the face of Clark's mere denial of the crime and highly improbable story of a sudden mental change in Price merging on insanity. Among the unfortunate man's papers was found a written statement, relating that Roger Clark was a fugitive in the country, thus discrediting Clark's contention that Price and he had parted friends and he had been given part of his outfit by the unfortunate man.

Though lean and emaciated, Red Doc did not forsake his post near the barracks door. Sergeant Corey often stopped by the solitary dog with encouraging words. He became strangely impressed by Doc's devotion and experienced a pronounced influence emanating from Doc, protesting Clark's innocence.

During the last days of the trial Red Doc sensed the self-conscious movements of men and their somber expression. His silent pleading gave way to anxious and unmistakable efforts to enlist sympathy. He padded restlessly about, nosed the hands of those who passed or planted himself in front of the door, refusing to move until he was recognized.

The courtroom was crowded. Though the widest liberty for personal defense was granted Clark, he had remained in a bewildered, apathetic state. It was all a hideous nightmare. After all truth was a liar and life a cheat. The situation was hopeless to his dulled comprehension.

As from immeasurable distance he caught scraps of words:

"Guilty— Murder— Why sentence shall not be passed?"

Roger Clark scarcely discerned a face or form in the blur about him.

"Your honor," he protested, "all I can say is, I couldn't do such a terrible thing."

He steadied himself with a chair.

"I am certain that Price wasn't right in his mind; the cold and hardships broke him. He must have been going insane. There is something more."

His lips moved but did not frame a word.

A movement near the door caused heads to turn. The judge lifted his eyes from the stricken face before him. Suddenly came confusion in one of the crowded aisles. Men moved apart.

A tall, lank dog came from between their feet. Half-way down the aisle he stopped. Every eye in the silent crowd was on the forlorn figure; all knew him and his faithfulness. His head was high, his hungry eyes glowing, searching every way.

A few paces more he paused again. With a movement that evaded sight, the dog leaped two rows of benches and the rail where Clark stood. There was a low moaning cry in the dog's throat. He threw his weight on Clark with such force that Clark braced himself to keep from being overthrown. The dog's silken head was on his breast.

Clark raised the head between his hands and looked long into the shining eyes, then threw his arms around the dog's neck, sobbing unashamed, burying his face in the dog's fur.

The hush in the crowded room seemed to deepen. Faces seared by arctic gales and cold were drawn in an agony of emotion.

A broad-shouldered miner, whose mass of hair was white as the North snow, moved uneasily.

"For God's sake, judge!"

He was on his feet.

"We can't stand this— Something ain't right— We all got dogs, ain't we?"

He flung out a protesting arm as he turned his weathered face to the crowd.

"It ain't right— We all know dogs—dogs knows more'n men do about some things. We all know they do—we all tried it. Something ain't right, judge."

He glanced once at the silent spectacle before them, then, stumbling out of the seat, made for the door.

Another man dressed in skin coat got to his feet, brushed a hand across his eyes, looked into the face of his neighbor and with resolute face and close-pressed lips marched out of the room.

These men knew dogs; they were men whose lives many times had been saved by the courage and faithfulness of man's great friend. One by one, busy with their own experiences and thoughts about the character of men who loved dogs and who were utterly loved by a brave, intelligent dog, they passed out of the courtroom.

The judge had lived long in the great Northwest; he too understood the qualities in a man that could make possible the scene that had moved every man in the courtroom. He informed Clark that sentence would be suspended for further investigation.

A few days later, in charge of Sergeant Corey and one additional member of the force, Clark and Doc were on their way up-river further to investigate the camp at Otter Spring.

Red Doc refused to be separated from Clark, night or day. To the transformed dog at his side, from the steamer's deck, Clark pointed out the divide between White River and the Yukon, where they had made their first game kill and had yielded to the call of the great untrodden places.

ARRIVED at the landing near the Otter Spring camp, they found the trail from the river to the cabin all but obliterated by masses of vivid green vegetation and brilliant flowers. They made camp in the open between the river and the cabin.

It was an unreal land to Clark. How different it now was from the vast white silence of that morning when he had parted from Price! Surely this spot, rejoicing in the beauty of flowers and the music of birds, could not be the place of crime, the sinister shadow of which lay dark upon his life!

They eagerly searched every foot in and about the cabin, river-bank and trail for an overlooked clew to the mystery of death; Doc the most indefatigable worker of them all. He seemed to understand that their search was in some way related to the unknown thing that had come upon his idol. He ranged over the ground, nose to the earth, always circling back about the cabin and camping-place. Clark often walked through the dense growth bidding Doc hunt—for what, he knew not.

Their search had continued unavailing for a week when Doc with lolling tongue one noon returned to their camp from one of his self-appointed sniffings and searchings. He appeared distraught and uneasy, returning repeatedly to Clark with questioning eyes, waiting about uneasily during the afternoon. Twice he left the camp-fire that evening, slipping away in the deepening shadows.

Impressed by his unwonted behavior, in the morning they followed him to the fatal camp. Nothing appeared to be disturbed. Doc hunkered down, ears pricked speculatively, observing their activities. Waiting until they had completed their investigations in and about the cabin, he trotted to the outdoor fireplace arranged for cooking dog-feed.

A scene of confusion greeted them. A deep hole had been dug on the spot where many fires had burned. Doc's tracks were everywhere in the freshly dug earth. A number of lava rocks had caved into the digging, and, evidently too heavy for Doc to paw out, had halted his operations.

Doc stood near the hole with a knowing twinkle in his eyes, quietly waving his red flag; and when Clark rolled the rocks out of the hole he promptly dived in, pawing out showers of rubble with swift dexterity. He thrust his nose into the fresh earth, inhaling deeply. His agitation increased as his paws swiftly worked; then his frenzied pawing uncovered what proved to be the corner of a box.

Clark crowded the excited, persistent Doc aside. In a few moments they had the buried box up and open. Within were valuable personal effects of the murdered man—his watch and several rings, together with a roll of bills to the sum of three thousand dollars. Price was known to have had some four thousand in currency with him.

When exposed to the air Doc discerned a repellent odor about the box. With his hair standing and a low snarl in his throat he finally examined the box and contents with his nose. When satisfied Red Doc drew slowly away, and, lifting his nose, wailed a dog's strange recognition of the presence of death.

What secret of violence and scent imprint of death had remained on the box and its contents, communicating to Doc's delicate faculties? What was the faint odor that had aroused Doc's curiosity and had caused him to dig in the ashes? Roger Clark shook his head to Sergeant Corey's questionings.

One fact the discovery of the box made clear, was that whoever the murderer was, he had planned to return to the cached valuables and money. As Sergeant Corey observed every move of man and dog he felt more convinced of Clark's innocence.

The long shadows of twilight slanted through the trees and verdure. Doc's every movement expressed his happy relief. Care-free, radiating vitality, whining with eager happiness, he pounced upon Clark and raced about the camp as if to say by every foolish prank:

"There now! We have found what we were hunting for; let's forget the deadly, clutching thing that would take away my idol and leave the world empty."

In the midst of his frolic Doc suddenly stopped with head cocked to one side, listening. Then came from a mass of spruce and willow near by the song of the hermit thrush. Its three notes, full of beauty, mystery and pathos, swelled forth in plaintive music.

Doc spread out his red paws, facing the three men, listening. After a moment's silence, from high above them in a birch was poured out a torrent of bubbling, liquid music. Sergeant Corey laid a finger upon his lips. Again and again the bobolink of the North, the Lapland longspur, filled the air with its throbbing song.

Scarcely had the "bobolink's" song ceased until from far off there echoed faintly the long-drawn howl of a wolf. They would not have noticed the lonely cry but for the intense silence of the moment.

Again the wolf-cry was repeated. It was a strange sound for the season. Red Doc listened intently, then stalked to the edge of the camp, inhaled up the wind and swiftly disappeared in the shadows toward the river.

At bedtime Red Doc had not returned. Once in the night Clark was awakened by the dog's investigating nose against his cheek, but in the morning Doc was not to be found.

The dog's continued absence was inexplicable. Corey placed a guard near the trail leading from the river to the camp while he and Clark examined the place again.

It was afternoon when Doc came racing into camp. Wet and mud-splashed, his worn and disheveled appearance indicated that he had traveled far. He nosed Clark's hand and came to Corey in friendly recognition, then trotted down the trail and stopped, peering into the deep shadows of the heavy timber.

"There is the wolf we heard last night."

Corey motioned to where Doc stood. Beyond the dog appeared a gaunt figure; but, unlike the wolf, head and tail were lifted.

The dog followed at Doc's heels toward the camp; they were on the edge of the camp itself before Clark recognized the strange visitor to be Skookum, the big malemiut. That morning they had been puzzled when they discovered fresh dog tracks about the camp-fire place, that were too broad to have been made by Doc. Skookum no doubt had visited the camp the night before.

The malemiut was shy. Avoiding their camp, she trotted toward the fatal cabin. Clark and Corey followed, watching as she paused at the cabin door. Nose scenting, she began slowly investigating every inch of the ground from the doorway directly to the hollow where the body of Price had been discovered; then she carefully nosed the spot where the body had lain. Her every movement was significant; it was evident that the dog still retained a haunting scent-memory of that which she had seen or knew of the disposal of the body.

They were certain that Skookum had been coming toward the Otter Spring camp when Doc recognized her weird call, so much resembling the wolf-cry. Then perhaps they had traveled to the camp from which she had come, and for some inscrutable reason had returned together. Could she have been coming alone to the scene of the crime? Where was the camp from which she had come? Who was there?

In an hour they had packed and were following Doc and Skookum as they led down the Yukon. Night found them a few miles below Five Fingers; but a full moon rose high, supplementing the loitering day. Fresh tracks in the soft Summer trail revealed that the dogs had passed both ways. They traveled through the few hours of darkness.

It was barely daylight when the dogs led on an old trail to a deserted trapper's cabin a mile back from the river. The wreck of a cabin had been recently occupied, and Doc expressed his dislike of the scent of the place by sniffing about with bristling shoulders.

After breakfast and an hour's rest all doubt as to the importance of the clew they were following was settled when Skookum headed through the timber, quartering toward the down-river trail and indicating that whoever had traveled with her up the Yukon as far as the trapper's cabin was no doubt returning the way he had come.

They had traveled eighteen hours from Otter Spring when Skookum halted at the mouth of a small stream entering the Yukon. She refused to go on and would have swum the main river if Clark had not prevented. They could find no boat, and it was noon before they managed to cross the Yukon on a hastily constructed raft.

Through trackless river bottoms and dense timber they followed the dog, who was never at a loss as to the direction. By holding Doc in they were enabled to slacken Skookum's pace.

Three miles back from the Yukon they scouted cautiously along the more open country. They could make but little of Skookum's movements; she had apparently arrived at her destination.

On a sharp rise of ground before them Red Doc lifted his head, reading a message in the air. Shifting back and forth, his anger mounted as he tested the wind.

He bellied toward a clump of willows, every hair on his back standing, then suddenly leaped from sight. Clark and Corey had scarcely gained the willows when the sharp report of a gun startled them.

Fifty feet more the figure of a man bulked in the center of a wide opening, and they saw Doc driving straight for the man. The rifle cracked again, and the dog whirled, dodging to one side. The man was following Doc's swift, dodging movements with his rifle, vainly trying to catch a bead on him through the sights, when Corey shouted at him. The man turned, gazing wildly into their menacing guns.

"What the —— you doing with a dog like that?" he cursed. "Keep him off or I'll shoot him."

"Drop that gun," Sergeant Corey commanded. "We have been watching for you. You were on your way to the cache. Come on, drop that gun quick!"

The bulky figure straightened. The man's eyes were wide with the shock of surprize and fear. He forced a guttural laugh and shifted the gun from the crook of the left arm to his right hand as if to comply with the officer's order.

The report of the rifle split the silence, but at the instant the gun cracked he was involved in a whirlwind of movement. In a single leap Doc had lunged ahead, clamping the man's leg with his fangs. The shot went above Clark's head as the impact of Doc's attack from behind slammed the man down across a log.

At Clark's command Doc backed away. The man did not attempt to rise. With wildly glaring eyes he stared up at the officer a moment, then quickly turned on his right side with his head curled low. There was a muffled report; the body relaxed and the head fell back, revealing a crimson blot at the chin. His right hand still gripped a revolver, pressed against his breast, muzzle up.

Upon searching the body they learned that the dead man's name was Bergman. Sewed in his clothing was a thousand dollars. A hundred yards beyond the open space, in a deep draw, they located Bergman's cabin, where he had evidently been in hiding since the murder and robbery of Price. Supplies and equipment from Price's outfit were found in and about the cabin.

How Bergman had discovered Price alone at Otter Spring camp, or what disposition he had made of the sleds and other dogs, they could only guess. It was not difficult to understand that Bergman, feeling secure in his hiding-place accompanied by Skookum—the one dog he had kept—had been cautiously returning to the cache at Otter Spring when Red Doc had appeared with the malemiut at the trapper's cabin, causing Bergman to retrace his steps.

ON A SUNLIT day, with arctic gold and blue above and the wild beauty of river, forest and mountain before them, Roger Clark, the two officers, Red Doc and Skookum, boarded a down-river steamer for Dawson City.

Standing forward on the main deck as the steamer swung down the Yukon, Clark turned to the repeated call of his name. In another instant brother and sister were in each other's arms. Their few words encompassed the events of her coming and made clear that with the full payment of the sum he had taken, the case against him had been dismissed.

Marian Clark held her brother at arm's length, marking the sturdy manliness of frame and face.

"And now, Roger—" her eyes shone bright, twinkling humorously— "where is he? I've come all the way to Alaska to meet that wonderful pal you have been telling me so much about."

Her voice trailed to a whisper as she inclined her head, questioningly toward the tall figure of Sergeant Corey.

A few feet away stood the proud red dog, the sun burnishing his mahogany-red coat, curiously observing the meeting of brother and sister.

"This is Doc. Come here, red boy!"

Clark stepped toward the dog.

With questioning eyes Doc seized Clark's hand in his teeth. He drew Doc to her.

"This is Doc, my wonderful pal. This is my Doc," he repeated.

Red Doc's nose touched the tips of Marian's extended fingers. She stroked his head. He crept closer, breathing the fragrance of her friendliness.

UNIQUE ARTILLERY AND A DARING FEAT

by Lewis Appleton Barker

IT IS no doubt surprizing to many to learn that the first cannons were composed of long strips of iron banded together, and loaded at the breech, and that muzzle loaders were not thought of for a long time after when they were supposed to be an improvement over the former. Nevertheless, one of the most peculiar pieces of ordnance ever invented, as well as one of the most unsatisfactory in its results—of a design probably never used again, at least by the same persons—was that which was tried for its sole occasion at the storming of Fort Henry, in what is now West Virginia, by Simon Girty, the famous renegade, and his several hundred Indian followers, on September first, 1777.

All day long, without success, and with considerable loss, the savages and their still more savage leader had been attempting to carry the little stockade with its handful of defenders. Night had settled down, and their patience was short, when some inventive genius amongst them suggested the making of artillery with which to batter down the stubborn walls, out of a hollow log. Probably, never before or since has such a cannon been seen. A maple log, already hollowed by the process of time, was bound with chains, plugged at the breech with wood and filled to the muzzle with stones, pieces of iron and other missiles. It was then conveyed to within sixty yards of the gate and discharged. Alas, the result was most unexpected and disheartening. The log burst into a thousand pieces, its fragments scattering in all directions, incidentally killing several of the attackers, but not a picket of the fort was injured. Their discouragement was such that further attack was posponed until morning, when a feat was accomplished that reminds one of General Israel Putnam's escape from the British troopers.

The garrison was reinforced at daybreak by forty men under Major McCulloch, all of whom entered the fort in safety but the commander. He, separated from his men, was obliged to fly to the open country for safety. The Indians were particularly anxious to capture him alive for the torture as they hated him intensely. So, refraining from shooting him, as they probably might have easily done since he was on horseback, they managed to hem him in on three sides, while on the fourth he faced the one hundred and fifty feet descent of an almost perpendicular precipice, at the bottom of which flowed Wheeling Creek. It was surrender or leap. There was no other choice.

Not a moment did he hesitate. His rifle in his left hand, and his reins grasped tightly in the right, he urged his mount, a powerful animal, directly to the brink and forced him to leap. The Indians thought him lost, but when they had reached the bottom by a circuitous path, the gallant horse had dashed safely through the creek and borne his master well out of harm's way.

The CAMP-FIRE
A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from Arthur O. Friel in connection with his serial beginning in this issue. I've already told you of his coming novelette based on his recent lone-handed trip up the Orinoco and Ventuari and that, in the future issue containing it, Mr. Friel will tell us about the actual trip itself.

New York City.

Brethren of the Camp-Fire, I have a confession to make. I am leading a double life. Now wait a minute—don't bounce any bricks off my dome until you hear the rest of it. Gimme a chance.

HERETOFORE the only tales of mine which have graced (or, mebbe, disgraced) the pages of *Adventure* were South American yarns; so most of you, probably, thought I wrote nothing else. The fact is, however, that I also do a North American story once in awhile. Now Big Chief Hoffman has caught me with the goods and intends to show me up by giving you "Cat-o'-Mountain." In self-defense, all I can say is that I don't write these North American tales very often (honest, judge, I don't) and that in so doing I'm not abandoning my old friends of the Alto Amazon; also, that in taking you into The Traps for awhile I believe I'm showing you a place which you never heard of before, and which has seen some rough stuff in its time.

I blundered into that hole in the hills more or less accidentally awhile ago, arriving one evening after sundown and pitching my pup-tent beside Coxing Kill; and the next morning, while I was humping my pack along the road on my way out, I was told to my face that I was a detective and asked what I was in there for. Forthwith I decided that this place was more interesting than it looked. As soon thereafter as I could do so, I returned to it, established myself in a lonely old house, and lived there quite some time. And, without giving too many incriminating details, I may add that "Cat-o'-Mountain" holds quite a few large grains of truth.

FOR instance, the throwing of *Lou Brackett* from the cliff wall, her striking in the tree, crawling to where she was found, and living to tell the truth of the matter, is Traps history. The man who wanted to get rid of her for another woman came down among the rocks with an ax afterward but missed her in the dark, as related in the story. Ninety-Nine's Mine, situated "where the sun first hits the wall in the morning," and locally reputed to be of silver, is still lost. The country is just as described, though so heavily forested that a chance passer along the road would never suspect the existence of the hidden caverns, crevasses and old trails; it takes time, and some risk, to find them. At the risk of being called a damliar, I will also add that the ghost in the garret is neither fiction nor imagination; it bumped around over my head and down the stairs for months, and I never did find out just what it was, though I laid for it twice with a gun. There was no hole at the foot of the stairs or up above, but a fellow has to make fiction more plausible than fact sometimes, so I have invented a natural explanation. The snake in the bed was —well, if I keep on you'll never believe me, so no more about that. I'll get back to safer ground by merely stating that the *Uncle Eb* of my tale is a very real old man, who now has left the Traps but would be instantly recognized by any one familiar with the Traps folks.

IN CASE some wise guy rises up to snort that such people and conditions as those of this story could never exist in New York State, I'll just say that the same thing can be found right now, a little south of the Shawangunk Hills—in the Ramapos, and also in New Jersey. One seldom hears about them, but they're there just the same, and occasionally they start something that gets them into the news of the day. "Wilder than anything the Kentucky mountains ever saw" was the description of them given a year or two ago by one of the New York papers.

So that's that. And I expect to keep on leading this double life of mine for awhile, and maybe another North American yarn will pop up right in the middle of my South American tales by and by—and then again, maybe not. I'm such an off-again-on-again-gone-again sort of cuss that half the time I can't tell what I'll pull off next.—A. O. Friel.

FROM our Camp-Fire cache the last grab brought out a bunch of letters written back in 1921. Guess I've made it plain before this that our cache is just a treasure-house from which we draw at random. Of course, sometimes a letter has to be used as soon as possible, but generally they don't lose anything by age and are good any time. Here's one, for example:

Main Camp Guard House,
U. S. Marine Corps,
Paris Island, S. C.

I was born in 1902 and have seen quite a few adventures for my age. Most of them were at sea, such as in a ship-wreck once, salvaging a ship at sea, with a 7,000 ton tramp steamer, in a howling Northwester, by going close enough to throw a heaving line aboard, and actually doing it. Ask any old timer what that means in a rough sea with a ship on her beam ends. It certainly was a gamble but we succeeded in doing it. I have sailed to most of the principal ports of Europe and South America and before I go West I hope to have seen all this little old world of ours. I have traveled over most of the U. S. via the sidedoor Pullman system, which, by the way, does not furnish a porter to help with one's baggage, and found many little adventures in that way. I put a year in the U. S. Marines during the late war but failed to get over to the other side, also a year in the Revenue Cutter service and then back to the Marines. After three months of service I got tired of barrack life so I took a five months' vacation without leave. I danced to the music and am now paying the fiddler by putting in my time in the guard house. As soon as I get out of the trouble I am in I mean to turn my hand to gold mining for a while. Well, I will close now, wishing you all good luck.—J. W. M.

THE following letter was longer, but I've left out the part that scolded me, pleasantly enough, for calling ours a man's magazine. It is, but don't we welcome any woman who is really interested in the same wholesome outdoor things as we are? She protests, also, that she's doing a man's work and gives the facts. Also she suggests a kind of Summer adventure club to be conducted by Hugh Pendexter and others of our writers over the historical American ground they write about. I wish it were any way possible. At all events, Hugh Pendexter or some other authority on American history will have to answer her question:

Miami, Florida.

Mr. Pendexter gave us a sketch of Benjamin Denny. I would like to know if he was any relation to Alexander Denny who lived and fought in the same cause about the same place and time as Benjamin did according to Mr. Pendexter. Some twenty years ago, when I was in Pittsburgh, digging out some early history, I found in the old Trinity Church graveyard a forgotten grave, almost hidden in dirt and sod. On cleaning off the flat top stone I deciphered the inscription, which read, as near as I can now remember: "Alexander Denny, A Man of Goodness and Probity, a Soldier of the Revolution." On making inquiry from the records of historical societies and at Washington, I got the story of this man, which is almost identical with what I read in *Adventure* as the life-story of Benjamin Denny. My papers were all lost in the Dayton, O., flood in 1912, but as soon as I read the story I wanted to ask Mr. Pendexter if he knew about the man whose grave I found.—Bertha R. Comstock.

ANOTHER 1921 letter from our Camp-Fire cache. Australia, Solomon Islands and movie people. Looks as if they owed him quite a handful of good tickets.

Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands.

On reading up a bunch of magazines handed to me by the capt. of steamer that links me up with civilization every 17 weeks I came across an *Adventure* of last year's issue and would be glad to give information to readers desirious of roaming this way.

I was raised up out back in N. S. W., Australia, on what you folks would call a ranch but we term a cattle station, but finding adventure coming tame after tackling every stunt in the Australian Bush I came down to the big smoke, Sydney and slipped away on a barkentine and eventually anchored my frame right here where I have been for the past ten years, my own color seldom seen, following the occupation of trader and blackbirder! in which I might say adventure is here in every minute of your life.

Well, quite recently an auxiliary schooner blew in from over your way, *Wisdom II*, with a staff of movie photographers. Being rather lonesome, I gave them a hearty welcome, then notwithstanding incurring a little danger and expense, I got together a tribe of headhunters, in full fighting regalia, who gave an original display (not a movie fake) of which the movie contingent seemed highly satisfied with the results. The remarks they passed being, "This is some shoot, Tommy. It's the best stuff we have gotten on to since leaving the States." And Tommy said "Sure! It will fetch some dollars."

Now I presume this outfit will get these same dollars, also credited with a big amount of heriosm stuff, while "yours truly" don't get a dime or brought into the limelight at all, but at some future date up in Sydney will be one of the crowd, unnoticed, paying for admission to see this same picture. Ugh, I am tired of adventure and probably by the time you get this scrawl I will be up in civilization enjoying what I missed all these years, my address then would be G. P. O., Sydney for any information.—Arlie G. Binnie.

TOO bad this comrade has been tied up so hard at home that he couldn't get around any. Anyhow he's lucky in being acquainted with *Hashknife et al* in the flesh or recently so. And say, seems to me I remember some of you telling me that W. C. Tuttle had never seen the West and didn't know his local color. "Bo'n and bred in a briah-patch, Brer Fox."

Newcastle, Wyoming.

I have not had the opportunity of roaming this old pig-iron world much but after serving in Cuba and the Islands during the unpleasantness with Spain I have sourdoughed around the Kuskokwim and the Kantishna, carried the mail up the Kuyokuk, hunted bear on Kodiak Island and mushed from White Horse to Circle City with six huskies following a few years' hard-rock experience in Goodrich Gulch and Anaconda, Montana and placering at Butte and Dublin Gulch and missed the "bullpen" at Wardner by ten minutes. In 1895 I was foreman on a coffee plantation 60 miles south of the equator and in 1907 came back to my old stamping-ground in the Black Hills and worked at the Elliston hoist in the Homestake at Lead.

I KNOW most of the old-timers in the Black Hills country and you can tell this Tuttle person when he writes *Hashknife* stories that old Jim Ryan who was Sheriff in the *Hashknife* days and Fred Coates who was deputy are still to be found right here at Newcastle. Axlebury and the Deadwood Kid are gone over the range, but there are plenty of people here who know that the *Hashknife* stories will never be told as the events really happened as there are laws against the use of such language in the U. S. mails and Tuttle nor any one else could tell them without using that kind of language. The Sun-dog country, Marlin City, The Devil's Tower, Thompson Creek, and the Cannonball are easily identified in present day Montana and Northeastern Wyoming and any one who thinks that Tuttle is drawing on his imagination is mistaken except that he has made heroes out of a few men we knew were just plain outlaws. But of course the difference between a hero and an outlaw is only the width of the court-room. You tell this Tuttle man if he will make a visit to Newcastle he can meet a lot of old *Hashknife* boys and also the sister of United States Deputy Marshal Joe Ryan who was killed at the *Hashknife* ranch while attempting the arrest of the Deadwood Kid.

With best wishes for the future success of "Adventure," I am—Gus. A. Fylee.

THE old-timers of our West are always doubly welcome at Camp-Fire, but I'm sorry Mr. Baker didn't talk to us longer:

Lewis Springs, Arizona.

Can you find a minute for one who has a bit of life, tasted to some extent the joys and sorrows of adventure and, although now in the evening of life, is still eager and willing to "hit the trail" to "the far places," look for the "Lost Adams" mine, "The Peg-Leg," "The Bryfogle" or the "Treasure of the Incas" or anything else that is hard to find and is *worth* finding? The day is still far distant when men (or at least a great many of them) will *not* seek adventure. It has been a long time since Jason set out on his search for "the Golden Fleece" and there are many Jasons still seeking it, or something to them just as attractive.

Over forty years ago, in my younger days I knew many of the noted men of the Old West. Some of them were Big *Men*, some *Little* Men and some were Just *Noise*. The much talked of Captain W. F. Drannan was, I am inclined to believe, a member of the *last* named class. I never heard of him until in the last ten or fifteen years, nor ever heard any of the real old-timers mention him or any of his adventures. If he were the wonderful scout and Indian killer he claimed to be, I can not understand why the Government kept the U. S. Army in the West. He alone could have handled the Indian question without any help.

I guess we all have hobbies. Mine is guns, especially rifles. My pleasures are field sports. Wishing you a pleasant journey along "The Open Road," I am—J. W. Baker.

THERE have been requests from some of you for more concerning the theory advanced by Talbot Mundy and E. F. Test on the Ark of the Covenant and the Lost Tribes and on Mr. Mundy's statement about the Great Pyramid. Also some very bitter complaints from three or four of you because that Lost Tribes Theory seemed to them a rank bit of pro-British propaganda in our pages. If excitable people would only consider Camp-Fire's usual methods as to discussions and theories they'd remember that at this open forum any of you can, within the bounds of reason, present any theory on anything, provided it's likely to interest most of us. Also that it has always been our custom to give the other side or sides a hearing.

Your letters nearly always go into our Camp-Fire cache to be drawn out at random. In that cache are letters taking the opposite side on the theories above. They'll come to you sooner or later and, in view of our excitable friends, I'll probably go a-fishing specially for them, so that the delay may not be too long. Of course any delay will be charitably interpreted by these excitable ones as merely the time necessary for us to get some one to write (or write 'em ourselves) some letters on the other side to save our face after we were "called" for doing propaganda. The excitable ones are in that case referred to the writers of these letters, with the suggestion that, before they call them liars and crooks hired by us liars, crooks, and propagandists here in the office, they consider the fact that an individual is not bound to the same forbearance under unwarranted insult as is a magazine and that abusive and groundless charges may land them in a court of law—or in a hospital.

Any time Camp-Fire hears one side of a discussion and has the other side barred from a hearing by me, please call my attention to it. It may happen by accident, though hardly in any case where either side gets at all "het up." There has never yet been a time when either side of a discussion has been barred by intent from a fair hearing at Camp-Fire.

THE following letter somehow got into our cache without my seeing it. Otherwise it would have come to Camp-Fire before this. It was written March 4, 1922. Can any of us solve this mystery that looks like a tragedy? The blank is for a word we couldn't make out.

I have had a problem on my hands for the past few months that I do not seem able to solve.

I SPENT the Summer and Autumn of last year on a combined hunting and prospecting trip in Northern British Columbia and Northwestern Alberta. In May on my way from Hinton, the gateway to —— parts to Sleep creek pass halfway between the Yellowhead Pass and River Pass, I found a mackinaw hunting-shirt and a Ross Rifle. They were both in good condition, seemingly newly left on the ground. In the pocket of the hunting-shirt was a lady's photograph, ordinary postcard size and the work of an amateur. The lady was in tennis togs and was in the attitude used in serving. In the same pocket was a diamond solitaire ring. Expecting that the owner would return to claim the property, I left the articles as I found them. Coming back in mid-September over the same ground, I camped near the same spot and was surprized to find that the shirt was still there—or rather portions of it, and it was nearly all eaten up and removed. The photo was gone, probably eaten by the same rats that had eaten the major portion of the shirt, but I found the ring still in what remained of the pocket. The rifle was in such a bad state with rust that I decided to leave it on the ground as I was compelled to travel light in order to get over the divide before the snow got too deep.

Now I could find no trace of any one going into that country who had not been accounted for. On the other hand I could find no trace of any one who had made that trip that season either from the Alberta or British Columbia side, although it is quite possible that a self-reliant man who was a bit of an outdoors man could have gone in and out without outfitting in the district and could have been able to live off the country in the Summer months without supplies. I can understand his abandoning his shirt and rifle, but why he should have abandoned the ring, which I have had valued and find is a —— perfect specimen and very valuable.

If you care to publish this letter, you might help me to solve the problem. The ring will be returned to any one who can show a reasonable claim to it.—FRANK F. BURDETT.

For obvious reasons I do not wish you to publish my address, although you can forward all mail you see fit to me.

TWO replies to a comrade's question about tarantulas. My own judgment in the matter, arrived at after very careful deliberation, is that the tarantula's habits are distinctly reprehensible and that he is of a darned mean disposition. But I have to admit he's interesting.

Charleston, South Carolina.

Being a close reader of *Adventure* I note in the last issue a query from Mr. A. S. Lanier of Brownsville, Texas, as to whether tarantulas commit suicide, and does a live one stay by his dead mate. I will not attempt to answer the first as it is a little beyond me, but I can inform our comrade quite a bit about tarantulas as I have read quite a bit on the subject and also know quite a bit from experience.

THERE are several different kinds of tarantulas but I will tell what I know of the one Comrade Lanier described, which, from his description is of the large-bodied, black, fuzzy variety found commonly all over Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Although he never asked about this, I will inform the readers that its bite is not fatal to man, or even serious. Thirty of them striking a man at the same time could not kill, as has been tested and proved by Professor Baerg, of the University of Arkansas. This gentleman tested them out by various means, finally winding up by letting an extra large one sink its fangs in him several times.

But to come to the question before the readers: The shell of the "dead tarantula" Comrade Lanier saw beside the live one was not the shell of a dead tarantula at all, but the discarded covering of the live tartantula he carried away in the bottle. They shed their outer covering annually. The skin splits around the upper edge of the main body in such a way that the entire top from the base of the arms that operate the poison fangs to the base of the abdomen comes off like a lid. The skin of the abdomen may or may not split along the middle of the back. The body gradually oozes out of the old skin, rising up and moving to the left in such a manner that when the operation is completed, the tarantula is seen lying on its side and facing in the opposite direction of the skin.

THE tarantula is a cannibal and will not only eat its young when hungry but sometimes eats its mate. A female tarantula generally hatches out about 600 little ones at a time and the first ones out of the eggs start eating other eggs that are not hatched yet.

Prof. Chas. T. Vorhies of the University of Arizona says that he can not supply one case whereby a person bitten by a tarantula ever died from the effects of it. And there are lots of tarantulas in Arizona, I can testify to that. I personally know more than a dozen men who have been bitten and they have nothing to show for it except the small scars that remain. Gila Monster and scorpion may also be included in this statement but I will not include the centipede. I don't know which I would rather be struck by, a centipede, swamp moccassin or a rattlesnake. There's not much choice.—RAYMOND W. THORP.

Now a second letter:

New York.

My personal opinion is that they are not nearly so much to be dreaded as usually believed. In the Summer of 1915 at Balboa, Canal Zone, I saw a Jamaican negro bit by Mr. Tarantula on the forearm. He applied a fresh chew of tobacco to the spot and then proceeded to "licker up" on gin. Next day he was back to work as usual and, when questioned if his arm hurt, he said no, but he felt dizzy from too much gin.

During the same year while at Las Cascadas, C. Z., I lay down on my bunk one evening without any light and felt something uncomfortable in the small of my back. Thinking some of the boys had played a joke on me by putting something between the sheets, I lit a candle to see just what it was. It was three half-grown scorpions and although I only had on a thin undershirt I was not stung. After that I always gave my bunk the once over before jumping in.

While I think that both the tarantula and the scorpion are both very much overrated as to deadliness, it has always been my policy to give either one of these gentlemen a wide berth and never dispute the right of way.—PIERCE B. WATSON.

Mr. Watson enclosed a page article from the *New York American* of September 24, 1922, quoting the *Scientific Monthly* on Professor W. J. Baerg's experiments outlined by Mr. Thorp. It states that Professor Charles T. Vorhies, of the University of Arizona, in his report on poisonous animals of the State, also says he can find no authenticated case of death from tarantula bite, though severe illness followed in some cases possibly complicated by fear and infection from other sources. Camp-Fire has already, I think, heard Professor Vorhies' verdict that a Gila Monster bite is not fatal to man, though possibly to a small child. The article does not state whether scorpions and centipedes are fatal, but gives the following:

> The repulsive scorpion, which looks something like a lobster, but is really a member of the spider family, is very common in Arizona. The scorpion's sting is in its tail. It stings by throwing the slender part of the abdomen up and forward over the back and striking forcibly with it, the curved spine or sting being driven with sufficient force to make the wound.
>
> All spiders are more or less venomous, and some of the smaller ones are more formidable than the larger. Professor Vorhies found the greatest number of wounds was caused by a small black spider half an inch long, sometimes known as "the black widow."
>
> As to the "hydrophobia skunk," Professor Vorhies found that several authenticated cases of death from skunk bite had occurred in Arizona. While it is certain that a skunk can not develop hydrophobia spontaneously, it may become infected during an epidemic among dogs. It also has a tendency to bite men while they are asleep.

A WORD from Stanton C. Lapham concerning his story in this issue. As to crossing dogs and wolves we've already had some opinions at Camp-Fire. If I'm not mistaken, the Trimble-Murfin Productions of Hollywood have quite a few specimens of dog-wolf along with Strongheart and the rest of their animal troupe, including quite a few full-blooded timber wolves.

As to malemiut and husky let's get that question straightened out. Following Mr. Lapham's letter is something that Victor Shaw said in "Ask Adventure" some issues ago. They differ a bit.

La Grande, Oregon.

One of the finest teams I saw in the North was five Irish setters. They were swift, hard, intelligent; with a wonderful way of adapting themselves to every difficult situation. They had but one failing, fight; say, they would fight anything, any time, anywhere and always. Must have been the Irish in 'em. You couldn't stop them and they usually licked.

THE husky proper is a distinct Northern dog. He is short-haired, long-legged, usually with a fine trim body. Has high shoulders, is long nosed and shows all the marks and traits of the North breed of dogs. However the word husky is frequetly if not commonly used to designate, malemiuts (Indian dogs and huskies when used in the traces). I have used the word both ways. Of course the malemiuts is the great dog of the North.

I have used the word, wolf-dog, applied to *Skookum* because of her appearance, that's all. I never saw one. There ain't any such, so far as I know. I never saw or have I known of a half-blood dog and wolf. Have you? If so where and when? Dogs are dogs, man's first and truest friend. I doubt if they ever were anything but dogs.

Camp-Fire friends, do you know the brave, intelligent persistent qualities of that noble dog, the Irish setter? He's finest of the fine.—STANTON C. LAPHAM.

P. S. It might be interesting to know that the events brought out regarding dogs, such as, finding the salmon beneath the ice, digging in the ashes, turning into the right trails without guidance, the moose hunt and a dog's apprehensiveness for one who is in danger are all facts of my own knowledge and observation in the North.—S. C. L.

NOW Mr. Shaw:

The true malemiut is really nothing but an arctic wolf that is but partially, or scarcely at all, domesticated. They rarely, if ever, lose their wolfish instincts (fiction tales to the contrary notwithstanding) and I doubt if pups could have their natural propensities trained out of them. . . . The word "malemiut," is an Alaska term. In Greenland, or along the western shores of Davis Straits and Baffin Bay, these dogs (in all points similar) are called "huskies" or by the Eskimo name. Big animals too, they are. I've known some that weighed 125 pounds.

In Alaska, as in all sub-arctic regions, or in the timber, or partially timbered sections, other types or breeds of dogs are used for sledge-work. If you have seen (or heard) of a true malemiut in the United States, the dog was either in transit or he didn't live to be very old. Almost any large-framed, strong dog will train easily for sledge-work, if it is of the shaggy-coated type. Sledge-dogs of this sort are often spoken of erroneously as malemiuts, and perhaps it was a dog of this sort you had in mind.

A year or so ago Jack Hines told me a man out on Long Island had—and I think was breeding for sale—some huskies. Also that they could stand our climate if in Summer you dug a hole in the earth for them to lie in in hot weather. A letter from Laurence Trimble of the Trimble-Murfin Productions tells me they have between sixty-five and seventy huskies. Also speaks of a bitch from Baffin's Land that is a "true malemiut in every sense of the word." The sire of her puppies is half-brother to Strongheart of motion picture fame.

Are malemiut and husky the same?

WITHOUT sufficient personal knowledge of the evidence, legal and general, on the case in point I venture no opinion, but am glad to give both sides. Mr. Bechdolt's series of articles on the old West has met the acid test of being laid before our audience of old-timers and their verdict, so far as I've seen expression of it, has been a practically unanimous endorsement of his pains-taking investigations and general accuracy.

First, a letter from E. A. Brininstool:

Los Angeles.

In the interests of fair play, I am asking you to give space to what may prove a little discussion regarding the Wild Bill-McCanles tragedy which was written up by Fred Bechdolt under the heading of "Boot Hill" in the May 30th issue. Therein Bechdolt recites the old and threadbare yarn of Hickok's alleged fight with ten outlaws.

The real truth of that affair is given in the enclosed article, the facts of which are taken from "Pioneer Tales of the Oregon Trail," by Chas. Dawson, now living in Omaha. Dawson knew many of the participants to this fight, and I believe he has the truth of it. It is beyond all reason that Wild Bill or any other man could fight ten men and clean out the whole bunch. Further, Dawson cites the court records to back up his claim—which it seems to me must be beyond all dispute.

Anyway, I ask that the enclosed be printed in the Camp-Fire section as a matter of justice to the McCanles family—some of whom are yet living in that section.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

The article follows:

One of the most widely-discussed of the many shooting affairs in which James B. Hickok (Wild Bill) figured in the frontier history of the West, is what is known as his fight with the so-called McCanles (erroneously spelled McCandlas) gang of border ruffians. This tragedy and murder took place at the Rock Creek station of the Overland Stage & Mail Company, operated by Ben Holladay, in what was then Jones county, Nebraska, but now embracing Gage and Jefferson counties, July 12, 1861.

MANY conflicting stories have appeared in print regarding this affair. In only one instance has the real truth been given, and this but recently. Some accounts state that Wild Bill was guarding the horses of the Overland Company at Rock Creek, when eight or ten desperate outlaws under the leadership of two of the McCanles boys, appeared and began to batter in the doors of the cabin in which Hickok was barricaded; that the men effected an entrance, and that Bill opened fire, and with four successive shots killed four of his assailants, then attacked the others with his knife and killed two more and desperately wounded the remaining outlaws. Another account states that Wild Bill was riding the Pony Express, and that as he approached the Rock Creek station he saw the wife of the station keeper struggling in the grasp of several outlaws; that Bill attacked them and killed six or seven in single combat.

These stories are all without any foundation or truth. The real facts—which can be proven by the court records—are as follows:

JAMES B. HICKOK was not called "Wild Bill" until after his fight at the McCanles home. There was no "gang of outlaws" to figure in the killing. Hickok was working for the Overland Company, and had been sent to the Rock Creek station to recuperate from wounds received some time previously in an encounter with a bear. It was in the Spring of 1861 that Hickok reached Rock Creek station, then kept by D. C. McCanles, who had come into that country some time previously from North Carolina.

The Overland Company owned what was known as the East Rock Creek ranch. They had hired a man named Horace Wellman to run it for them. When Hickok reached the station, he was given work by McCanles as a herder of the stage and mail horses. This was his employment at the time of the murder of McCanles and his two friends. Hickok was 24 years old at the time.

Hickok had a weakness for gambling, and his methods of winning did not please the other men employed by McCanles, and it is stated that the latter "man-handled" Hickok for his unfair methods of card playing, warning him to cease gambling or quit his employ. Hickok, naturally, became an enemy of McCanles.

A WOMAN figured largely in this tragedy. Her name was Kate Schell, and she was the paramour of McCanles, having followed him west from the mountains of North Carolian. I am not upholding McCanles as any paragon of virtue. I am simply stating plain facts, and the reader must form his own opinions.

Hickok, it is stated, became enamored of this girl, who was beautiful in face and form. When this became known to McCanles he ordered Hickok to keep away from her, under pain of personal violence or death. McCanles was a large, powerful man, and as Hickok was far from being his equal in brute strength, he moved away a short distance and took up his abode in a dug-out by himself.

THERE were certain payments due the Overland Company from Wellman, which he had failed to come through with. McCanles took him to task for this neglect, and finally Wellman agreed to go to Nebraska City and make arrangements to pay what he owed. Anyway, he said that such was his intention. He started off in July on this trip. McCanles also was absent from the Rock Creek station about the same time. Hickok, it is alleged, thereupon moved back over the Rock Creek station and held high revelry with Kate Schell in their absence. Wellman was accompanied on his trip by Monroe McCanles, the 14-year-old son of McCanles.

When Wellman returned from Nebraska City, he told the boy to inform his father that he did not get the money to make the payments. This greatly angered McCanles, and he determined to demand an explanation.

IT WAS on the afternoon of July 12th that McCanles set out for a personal interview with Wellman. He was accompanied by James Wood, a cousin, James Gordon, a man in his employ, and his son, Monroe. McCanles senior was armed with a shotgun; the other men carried revolvers in their belts.

McCanles asked his friends to remain at one side while he interviewed Wellman. Accompanied by his son, he walked toward the Wellman house. Wellman was met on the doorstep. McCanles at once charged him with fraud, and demanded payment or possession of the premises. Words followed, and Wellman, fearing McCanles, retreated into the house. Hickok was also within, as was the Schell woman and Mrs. Wellman. The latter came to the door and volleyed forth abuse upon McCanles. Hickok also came to the door and confronted McCanles, who demanded that he not interfere with business with which he was not connected.

"My business is with Wellman, not you," remonstrated McCanles. "But if you want to take a hand in it, come on out here and we will settle it like men."

INSTEAD of complying, Hickok stepped back into the house and closed the door, at which McCanles grew suspicious, and went around to the front of the house where a door was standing open, through which he could command a view of the entire interior, with the exception of a portion across which a curtain was strung, which screened a bed from the rest of the room. As McCanles stepped inside, he saw Wellman and Hickok in earnest conversation. To allay their suspicions he asked for a drink of water. Hickok gave it to him, then retreated behind the curtain, from which point he could see through, without being seen by persons in the room.

McCanles at once called upon Hickok to come out from behind the curtain and fight fair. The only answer was a shot, and McCanles fell, mortally wounded. His son Monroe immediately ran to his assistance, supporting his head, and McCanles died in his son's arms.

WOODS and Gordon, hearing the shot, and seeing McCanles fall from the doorway to the steps, ran toward the house. As Woods stepped upon the threshold, Hickok shot him twice. Woods, mortally wounded, ran around the house and fell into a clump of weeds by the roadside. Gordon was following behind Woods, and Hickok shot him in the same manner. As Gordon turned to run, Hickok shot him again in the back. The wounded man staggered away into some dense underbrush.

In the meantime Woods had been located in the weeds by the roadside. Tradition says that one of the women finished him with a grubbing-hoe. Then, flourishing the bloody weapon, she started for young McCanles. crying, "Kill all the blankety-blanks." The boy, yet dazed, and holding his dead father's head in his arms, leaped to his feet and dashed away, followed by several shots from Hickok's pistol, none of which struck him.

McCanles owned a bloodhound. Hickok secured the animal and set him upon the bloody trail of Gordon, who was soon run down in the underbrush. He begged for his life, but was killed with a charge of buckshot from a shotgun.

HICKOK, with others, was arrested, charged with manslaughter. After a short trial, however, he was declared not guilty, upon the plea of self-defense. (NOTE: General index, District

Court of Jones county, Nebraska, transcript book, page 4; State of Nebraska, plaintiff, William B. Hickok, J. W. Brink and Horace Wellman, defendants, July 18, 1861.)

Hickok's version of the affair, and that of his friends, given at the trial, resulted in his being called "Wild Bill," by which name he was ever afterward known. He left the county shortly after the murders, as feeling against him ran very high.

Kate Schell was put aboard a west-bound stage early the next morning after the tragedy, and became a noted character of the early history of the Black Hills section.

Next. Mr. Bechdolt's reply:

The version of the McCandless killing whereby Wild Bill Hickok got his name as told in Boot Hill is the one generally accepted by good authorities. Root & Connelly's Overland Stage to California; Custer's Wild Life on the Plains; Personal Recollections of General Nelson Miles and similar works are among these.

AS TO the merits of this version, the argument of Mr. Brininstool speaks of the court records as proving his contention. And then this same argument goes on to state that, in these same court proceedings, Hickok was acquitted. Whereby I take it for granted that the jury accepted Hickok's story. And Hickok's story, at least as afterward told by him, is the one given in this article. Anyhow, whether or not that version of Hickok's was given at the trial, the outcome of the proceedings shows plainly that the McCandless version was *not* believed by the jury. So I guess we are fairly safe in sticking by the tale as given in my article.

IN PASSING let me remark that some of these old killings are enwrapped in a maze of assertions and contradictions. Undoubtedly in a number of cases the wrong man has come out with credit. But on the other hand there are countless instances where the true story of a slaying has been contradicted by a dozen or two apocryphal versions which sprang to life, in many cases, because of personal animosities. In Hickok's case his long career in various towns seems to have left a pretty clean record as far as the killings go. The man was widely esteemed by big men. And I can see no reason at this date for accepting a story told against him by men, some of whom have come down in history with reputations not of the best.—F. R. Bechdolt.

BACK to a 1920 Camp-Fire. C. A. M.'s original letter got misplaced in our office after going to the printer, so I couldn't send comrade Iaeger the full name and address. If C. A. M. is with us at this meeting, please speak up. My memory is so blamed unreliable that it won't even let me just call it no good and forget about it. Sometimes it remembers things even a good memory wouldn't be ashamed of. Have handled thousands of letters since that one, but, unless my memory's double crossed me this time, C. A. M. was a woman and a Mrs.

Chadron, Nebraska, August 16, 1920.

Answering inquiry of July 18, 1920, Camp-Fire *i. e.* "Who knows about this Nebraska stone wall apparently built in ancient times?" . . . "Do any of the readers know Billie the Bear, a pioneer cowboy? Also Red Jacket, a well known character of pioneer days of the west? C. A. M."

I WOULD like to know who "C. A. M." is and his address. I am the "Billie the Bear" he refers to and who C. A. M. is I can not figure out and will be pleased to correspond with him as he evidently has been here on the ground from his talk.

The Red Jacket referred to in the article above cited is now some where in the far beyond and a charitable view-point places him some where in "Paradise lost and regained." She died here all alone in a small house some 15 years ago or more one cold wintry night and when found her limbs were in such distorted shape they had to be sawed off in order to allow the remains to be enclosed in a burial box. But the sexton of the cemetery where she was supposed to have been buried averred, when ordered to unearth the remains, that "dar was noddings in," for rumor had it the body had been sold to a medical college.

The natural wall spoken of by C. A. M. is still here in the same cañon, although relic hunters and sight-seers have greatly diminished its visible existence. As to who built it and where the stone came from nothing has been done to find out from a really admitted scientific source, but inasmuch as vast lava excrements have been found underneath that and other structures of like character in and about the region thereof, a conclusion well founded has been reached that this wall was of shale formation harder than usual and pushed up through the earth and in some parts to the surface while the seeming joints are nothing more than natural breaks in the shale which exposure to the air has hardened.

Yes, C. A. M., I am still here in Chadron, the county seat of Dawes County, Nebraska, where I have been since October 1885. As you no doubt know, 37 years ago last February 22nd, I lost both feet and all my fingers in a blizzard in Wyoming. Repairing to my former stamping ground in northwest Nebraska, where as a cowboy I roamed free in my youth before my sad misfortune, I have enjoyed and am still enjoying myself by retaining the confidence of my fellow men who for the past 33 years have kept me in some office or other. I am at present clerk of the District Court and Deputy Clerk of the United States District Court, coming up again this Fall for re-election for a fourth term to the former named office, the later office is by appointment. Write me.—L. J. F. Iaeger ("Billy the Bear").

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MINING and PROSPECTING

VICTOR SHAW, 161 West 11th Ave., Columbus, O. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

All inquiries for information regarding the national parks, how to get there and what to do when you get there, should be addressed to the National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Placer-Mining

HERE'S another trustful soul asking an "A. A." man to tip him off to a gold-field:

Question:—"Am enclosing photograph and description (which please return to me) of a placer-mining machine which I own. Just have about sufficient capital to place same in operation providing I can find a suitable location, and am writing to ask your advice (having seen your name in *Adventure*) as to the advisability and feasibility of carrying out a venture of this kind. Have read Eugene B. Wilson's book, "Hydraulic and Placer Mining," and through various other sources have learned that placers exist near Kirkland, Ariz., in one of the forks of the American River near Auburn, Calif., on the beaches near Bandon and Marshfield, Ore., and in the bed of the Columbia River near Davenport, Wash.

With the exception of a trip by train to Helena, Mont., I have never been in the West, but am planning to buy a Ford this Summer and visit and prospect the places mentioned above. Have a small hand model of this placer machine and know that it works. What the big machine will do, I do not know as I have never had it in operation on any placer although I have seen non-gold-bearing sand and gravel worked through it during a demonstration.

Kindly advise if you are familiar with any of the above locations; also if you could suggest others; what you think of them, and any special or local sources of information from which I might secure additional data. Would prefer surface placer containing an average of one dollar or more per cubic yard. Have a position paying me $1,500 per annum. Would you think it advisable for me to give up this position and attempt to make a success of placer-mining with this machine (aided by a team of horses and a scoop shovel)?"—ROBERT W. MCGUFFIE, Fairfield, O.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The only placer field I know that is not being worked and that will yield any such sum as a dollar a yard, is at Dolores, N. M., and it has been in litigation for ten years or more. Anybody trying to work it would be liable to pack off lead in his body.

If I knew land open for staking that would yield that amount, I would go to the telephone, call up some of my friends and begin to pack for a trip. I would stake the first claim myself.

You can no more hope to have any man tell you where to find a field like that than you can hope to have a banker give you leave to rifle his vaults. Gravel as rich as that would be a bonanza. Our dredges are making money at half that or less. They work land that carries only 35 cents to the yard.

Think twice before you give up a salary for a gambler's chance.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Getting By in Frontenac County

YOU won't make much money there; but then you won't need much money. And if you're out to enjoy life, Mr. Moore is here to tell the world that you can do it in that country:

Question:—"I am taking the liberty of writing you in regard to land situated in the vicinity of Gull and Long Lakes, Frontenac County, Ontario.

Is the land adapted to general farming or fruit-growing, and could you make a good living farming?

How is the hunting and fishing in this section, and what kind of game and fish?

How are the Winters in regard to snow and cold weather?

How are the taxes on these lands? Are they very high?

Is there anywhere I could purchase topographical maps of this section?

Kindly give me your own ideas in regard to farming and living conditions, and if you think it would be advisable to try farming in this section; and I would greatly appreciate any other information you can give me.

If you wish to use this in *Adventure*, kindly use initials of name only."—R. E. de L., Altoona, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—As though by a strange trick of the thing that rules our being, I was up to Long Lake last Fall and fished in some of the lakes up there. I was not at Gull Lake, but the country is all the same. There are a few deer in there and lots of black bass. I am sure you will find gray trout and also in the small creeks, speckled trout. Partridge are plentiful, as are also snowshoe hares; there are also foxes, an odd bear, wolf and moose.

Now as regards the land. What I saw of it is not suitable for farming, although, mind you, people live in there, have raised big families and are getting along all right. One man I met was the reeve of the township some thirty-five years in succession, warden of the County of Frontenac, owned a McLauchlin car and had done well. Told me he came originally from Virginia, I think, although he is of Scotch descent. Has been in there over fifty years. Made his living by taking up some land composed of little valleys where he could grow his own vegetables, a little corn and oats and stuff like that for fodder; had lots of wild hay to help out and to be had for the cutting, worked with lumber companies in the shanties in Winter, worked on the drive in Spring. Brought up a big family and has certainly done wonders with what he had to work on.

No fruit of any consequence can be grown in there. The seasons are too short. Frost comes too early for one thing; Winters are more severe than fifty miles or so farther south; snow is usually deep and lasts long. Some Winters are exceptions, of course.

The taxes are very low. The land costs little per acre. You could pick up something real cheap by writing to the County Treasurer, County of Frontenac, Kingston, Ontario, and ask him to send you a list of properties in the northern part of the country which are to be sold for taxes. If taxes are not paid over here the land is sold publicly. You might also ask him if he knows of anybody who has land up there for sale and the price per acre.

I might just say here that there are various kinds of mineral in the north of Frontenac. Whether you would find anything that would pay you is another question, but one can never tell what is around the bend in a strange road.

If you want a good map of that district send fifteen cents to Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, and ask him for "The Kingston Sheet," Topographical Survey Map. I hope I have told you something you want to know; if not, write again and I shall do all I can for you.

Skiing in New York State

A WINTER sport that seems to be growing rapidly in general favor:

Question:—"I would like to take up skiing this Winter. Hills in New York.

Please advise me as to outfit and how to use it. I am 5 feet, 11½ inches in height."—PRENTICE STRONG, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Townsend:—I would get a silk tassel-cap, an ordinary "sweat-shirt," any kind of light-weight riding-breeches, a pair of warm mittens, a pair of golf stockings and a pair of high shoes of the Alaskan pack-shoe type, which you should keep well oiled. When getting the shoes do not get a pair any higher than the ordinary high shoe. as if they extend much above the ankle they will bind the muscles in the calves of your legs and become very tiresome.

There are two kinds of skis. The Swedish type is narrow and perfectly flat from the rear end to the place where it starts to curve at the point in the front. These are made particularly for running and are not so adaptable for jumping.

The Norwegian type is wider throughout. There is a distinct arch, the center of which is directly under the sandal, in this type of ski, which gives them more spring and makes jumping easier. Personally I prefer the Norwegian ski for all sorts of work.

There are two kinds of sandals made. One is of leather, and the other is much like the clamp of an ice skate, being made of metal. The leather one is far superior.

The length of your skis should be a little longer than the distance from the floor to the tips of your fingers when your right arm is extended perpendicularly as you stand in an erect position.

It would be almost impossible for me to teach you to run skis by letter. If you go up into the hills of New York you will doubtless find plenty of people who will be glad to show you how. It is more skill than strength, and once you learn how you will enjoy it a great deal. I think it is one of the best sports that we have.

I would advice you to obtain the following books: "How to Ski" by Vivian Caulfeild (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York City) and "How to Ski" by Henry Hock, English version by Aldrich Benziger (Aldrich Benziger, 54 South Street, New York City).

Both of these books are *good!* You will get all that is possible to learn about skiing from these two volumes.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose **full** ***return postage to carry it, you don't want it.***

"Orient-Levant" Discussion Again

MR. BINDA sends this along for publication "without prejudice," as the lawyers would say:

San Francisco, Calif.

MY DEAR MR. BINDA: I have just read, in the August 30th issue of *Adventure*, page 189, your answer to the question as to the difference between the Orient and the Levant, and am surprized at the limitation in your answer of the bounds of the Orient.

Why only about 30 degrees North?

It is quite true, as the editor suggests, that the terms are more or less indefinite; but I believe it is pretty general throughout the world to include in this term all of both the Chinese and Japanese in contradistinction to your definition, which would exclude a large part of China and all of Japan. As a matter of fact, it is my impression that the word "Oriental" as applied to an individual, as understood generally throughout the U. S., refers more specifically to the Chinaman or the Japanese—much more so and much more often than to the Indian or other Asiatic or southern Asiatic island race.

Properly, and particularly as regards this coast for instance, the word "Orient" covers:

> China } *These two especially*
> Japan }
> and all the western coast of the Pacific Ocean on around past India to the Indian-Persian line. All the islands off the southern Asiatic coast including Java, Sumatra, Borneo, the Celebes, the Philippines, etc.
> (Sometimes even Australia)

The "Levant" specifically, as I have generally heard it, is understood usually to mean Egypt and the Asiatic coast bordering the Mediterranean up to and including what was Turkey in Europe.

Written in passing, in no spirit of criticism, and merely to raise the question in a friendly way. The terms are indefinite, and I suppose either one of us has as much right to his opinion as the other.

Written from San Francisco. My next address will be (?)—J. P. RICHARDSON.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Diamond Strike in British Guiana

AT LAST this backward colony seems to be showing signs of life:

Question:—"I would like a little information in regard to trade and what to trade on a trip to Georgetown, British Guiana, taking the islands from south of Key West and all the way down to Georgetown.

I have a boat 30 feet long and equipped with sail and heavy-duty engine. We are three men to go, and we would appreciate any information you could give us. We are expecting to take a load of parrots home with us."—K. ANDERSON, Charleston, S. C.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—I'm afraid you could do very little profitable trading with a boat thirty feet long. Much of the space available is already taken up by the engine and fuel space, and when three men with equipment and stores are added there can be very little room left. In any case, there is very little opportunity for trading on the islands, such business being already well taken care of.

A letter received today* from Georgetown tells of a big diamond discovery and a rush of prospectors and diggers to town. My correspondent informs me that even the negroes are making fortunes there and spending them in the town.

It might pay you to load up with camp equipment and go down there direct. You could sell the equipment at a good profit no doubt; or you might find it advisable to use some of it yourself. I believe there is no doubt about the accuracy of my correspondent's information.

I am sorry I can not advise you to better effect.

Metal-Nosed Revolver Bullets

MR. WIGGINS is ag'in' 'em:

Question:—"Will a .32-20 Colt army special stand the use of metal-jacketed bullets—not high-velocity, but low-pressure smokeless and jacketed bullets?

Please do not use name or address if this should be published."

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I always advise against the use of metal-cased bullets in revolvers, as this seems to damage them in time. I know of one fine .32-20 Colt S. A. army that was ruined by about five hundred rounds of this type of cartridge; a gunsmith here had four barrels of this caliber which have burst by reason of the bullets sticking in them, also. Use a lead bullet, sez I.

You can either load them yourself, or by a letter to the Remington Arms Co., Cunard Bldg., 25 Broadway, New York, N. Y., you will be informed as to where you can secure them.

I enclose a little information in regard to revolvers.

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* *Aug. 21, 1922.*

How the Wheel-Lock Was Fired

ALSO a few words on books dealing with old firearms, and antiquarians dealing in them:

Question:—"I have been collecting weapons for many years in a rather desultory and unsystematic way; confining my collection of firearms—outside of a few 'odds and ends'—to those antedating percussion, but giving myself wide range among other weapons. I have one large room in my home in Virginia, decorated on all four sides with weapons, and have a large and valued lot which are *too short* to hang safely on walls where the studding is four feet apart; and I have wondered just when I may bring myself to rebuilding the house, in order to accommodate them.

My business in ordinary times keeps me out in this country; only going home for a few days yearly; but I occasionally pick up something treasurable out here, and carry it back.

I have never found any books of any great value on the subject. The one by Aug. Demin which you mention *sounds* familiar, and I think I have it at home. I also remember the name of one other—'The Sword and the Centuries.' Although both books seem to give much information, with long lists of armorers' stamps and other marks, I don't remember of any single description which fits anything I have.

I should much like to know just how, for instance, one managed to fire a wheel-lock which I own. It is a beautiful weapon, rifled, lock engraved and stock inlaid with ivory; but there is no shoulder-piece, the butt being a plate of horn set at an angle with axis of piece, and with a small, loose horn button.

I have an old, double-edged straight sword with the remains of a beautiful handle; on the blade is stamped in large figures 1 4 4 1, and a rough animal —possibly a wolf. Did this come from the 'wolf' factory at Solingen? I don't know. And so it goes through almost my entire list; my two books give no clear descriptions.

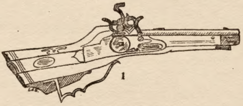
Most dealers in antiques know nothing, but have a series of conventional phrases to fit any article; but they *don't* fit.

There are many questions which I would like to ask, but I fear that it would hardly do. If you find time to reply—giving me some further references upon old weapons—I shall be obliged."—F. C. SMITH, Chloride, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—I think that you will find it possible to put up all kinds of weapons, even long guns, on most walls, irrespective of studding. I have some four hundred on the walls of my dining-room, varying from three inches to an Arabian snaphaunce of over six feet, and save in the case of very heavy wall guns, place my dependence in the lathing and two brass hooks with a right-angle turn. A very few heavy wall guns I have had to place along the wainscoting, but I manage a twelve-pound over-and-under Kentucky rifle through the plaster. I should like very much to see your lot or to hear a more detailed description of them.

There are many good books, but the majority of them, like Demin, treat principally of arms prior to gunpowder. I can not impress too strongly on you that you should get Sawyer's book that I detailed in the letter you refer to. There you will find full descriptions and plates of nearly all kinds of gunpowder weapons. Probably the blade that you speak of bearing the "wolf mark" came from one of the Solingen makers. I have a number of them.

You are quite correct in saying that most dealers in antiques know nothing of arms. Naturally, as that is a small part of their business. You will find, however, that Mr. Stephen Van Rensselaer or Mr. Sumner Healey, both of Madison Avenue, N. Y., are men of considerable knowledge concerning arms, either being amply capable of cataloguing a collection—something, I believe, that Mr. Van Rensselaer frequently does for auction sales. I have found his descriptions to be very accurate, and it is a pleasure to go over a catalog arranged by him after some that we see. Mr. Healey is a charming gentleman with whom it is always a pleasure to deal or to talk of weapons.



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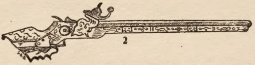

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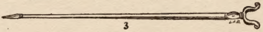

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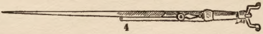

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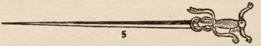

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There are others who furnish excellent pieces at reasonable prices, notably Mr. F. E. Ellis of Webster Groves, Mo., but as I have not the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with them, I cannot testify as to their knowledge of weapons.

As to how your wheel-lock was fired; I have not seen it, but I enclose several little sketches for illustration. Such a weapon as No. 1 was fired from the side, resting the butt against the body or across the arm. No. 2 was fired from a rest embedded in the ground, such as 3, 4 and 5, known in English as a "gun fork," in German, a "*gabel,*" and in French a "*fourquine.*" 3 and 4, the latter having a wheel-lock pistol attached to a three-sided dart of steel, damascened with gold, are of the sixteenth century, and 5 of the early seventeenth.

I shall be glad to hear from you at any time. Well, I must close, with hope that you may succeed in arranging your arms more systematically. And by all means purchase all of Sawyer's books. Write him directly—Chas. Winthrop Sawyer, 41 Humphreys St., Boston.

"Firearms in American History." Vol. I	$3.75.
"Firearms in American History." Vol. II (The Revolver).	
"United States Martial Pistols."	$2.50
"Our Rifles." (Vol. III).	4.75

Land and Wild Life in Arkansas

THE Ozarks apparently provide one of the few spots in the United States where Daniel Boone would find himself at home today:

Question:—"Would like to be informed of the following about Arkansas:

1. Is all the country settled, or is a lot of the country lying idle?
2. What game animals and birds are found there?
3. Could a person live by making trapping and hunting a profession?
4. Are there any predacious animals in any part of the country?
5. What guns would you advise to use in this country?
6. Are the ranges in this State good, and are they heavily stocked?
7. Is the country as a rule rocky, broken and brushy?
8. Are fish plentiful in the streams, and what kind are they?"—CHARLES WHITEFORD, Osawatomie, Kan.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—1. There is a lot of country lying idle in the State of Arkansas.

2. There are quails, geese, ducks, doves, snipe, rabbits, squirrels, deer, coons, possum, bear and most small game.

3. I would not advise trying to live on trapping and hunting alone. Trapping might carry you through the Winter, but you are not allowed to sell game, nor kill any during the closed seasons.

4. Yes, there are timber-wolves, minks, foxes, etc.

5. Twelve-gages hotgun, .250-3000 rifle.

6. In most of the State the range is exceedingly good, and very seldom do you find it overstocked except very close to the larger towns.

7. West of the Iron Mountain most of the country except valleys is rough and broken and very brushy only where the big timber has been cut over.

8. All of the streams have plenty of bass, pike, wall-eyed pike, catfish, drum, buffalo, crappie, rock bass, sturgeon, sunfish, etc.

Mineral Wealth of Siberia

AS ENORMOUS as it is unattainable—under present circumstances at least:

Question:—"Am an old Alaskan prospector, residing in Detroit at present, and would like information in regard to Siberian mineral deposits, their locations and mining laws in connection therewith.

Have the Japanese paramount influence?

What are best railroad connections from here, and cheapest place to buy grub-stake and equipment?"—WALTER SILKY, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—Just at present, owing to the generally unsettled condition of Russian and Siberian affairs, it is impossible to give you any accurate information with reference to mining or any other laws there. It is a known thing that there are all kinds of valuable minerals along the north slope of the mountain ranges separating China and Siberia—gold in the east, iron, copper, silver and other minerals toward the west—but it is an immense territory and has not been covered yet by explorations.

While the Japanese hold the key to the railroad connections in the east, they are not administrating the Government of Siberia. At present there is no accredited Government.

For that reason I doubt if our authorities would issue a passport to you—which would be required by all steamship companies from which you might want to purchase tickets—and there is no Siberian Government representative in this country to visé a passport should one be issued.

If, however, you want to approach Siberia through Manchuria, or prospect in that part of Manchuria or Mongolia which is under Japanese control through the administration of the South Manchuria Railway Company, you will be able to secure all official information necessary to your needs by writing the company's agent in this country—Mr. Yozo Tamura, 111 Broadway, New York City.

Ice Seven Feet Thick

IT HAPPENED on Hudson Bay:

Question:—"I would like to have the following information, relative to climatic conditions around Hudson Bay, in northern Manitoba if possible.

Just how cold, during the Winter months, does it get at York Factory on Nelson River, or Fort Churchill, on the Churchill River?

And what is the lowest degree ever recorded at these places?

I am very desirous of obtaining *very* accurate information on the above places."—C. K. SMITH, Jacksonville, Fla.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—As far as I can ascertain, about the coldest temperature recorded by York Factory or Fort Churchill, is fifty-five degrees below zero. The atmosphere is very raw, and biting winds blow across from the Hudson Bay. Colder temperatures are experienced in the Barren Lands. During the Winter months the temperature would range from zero to fifty below zero. The ice has been known to be more than seven feet thick at Hudson Bay.

Maori Curios

IF YOU know anybody who has one, you can tell him he owns something money can't buy—that is, buy from a Maori:

Question:—"Please tell me how and where to get a catalog or list of curios such as knives, ornaments, etc., and company I could purchase same from in New Zealand."—R. SHACKLEFORD, Woodberry, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—It is sorrowful I am that I can not satisfy you with the address of a curio shop. The fact is that Maori curios are so rare and valuable—being mainly heirlooms of tribes and chiefs—that there is not enough of them to satisfy either museums or private collectors. You can easily realize, therefore, that there is no surplus for a curiosity shop. Hence the absence of any catalogs. The greatest honor a Maori chief can pay to a distinguished visitor is to give him a war weapon—and at that the trophy is likely to have been in the chief's family for hundreds of years.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WYNNE, HERBERT. Ex-sailor serving on U. S. S. *Lakeside* during war. Any information will be appreciated by his buddy.—Address "Harry" care of *Adventure.*

RODGERS, CLIFFORD GRANT. Born Nov. 18, 1895 at Atlanta, Ga. Last heard of three years ago. Veteran of World War. At the time of his enlistment he was employed as fireman on some railroad at Galion, Ohio. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address John Leuford Rodgers, 1404 Prytania St., New Orleans, La.

MULLER, E. Water-tender on S. S. *Casper.* Write to old shipmate.—Address Shorty, care of *Adventure.*

BOWLLY, CHARLES AND JOHN. Ex-navy men. Last heard of they were in Berkeley, Calif. Your old pal would like to hear from you.—Address Hardy, care of *Adventure.*

WOODRUFF, MARY L. Age eighteen, and Lucille A., age sixteen. Last seen in New Orleans in 1920. Any information will be appreciated by their brother.—H. L. Woodruff, Seamen Institute, 25 South St., New York.

SHEPARD, HAROLD. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif., about 1916. Later heard he went over seas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address J. Martin, 111 W. 127th St., N. Y. C.

BAKER, HALARD. Left home May, 1920. Last heard of was in Greeley, Colorado. Age twenty-six. Light complexion, five feet, weighs about 140 lbs. Was in Navy for two years. Father has died since he left home. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. Sarah Baker, Three Rivers, Mich.

POWELL. JESSE. Left near Memphis, Tenn., about forty-seven years ago. Went to Mexico and became gold miner. Later moved to Cripple Creek and Anaconda, Colorado, where he married Nellie Higgins. His nearest relatives are in Tennessee and are requested to write to his daughter.—Address Hazel Powell, 220 East 32nd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

ROST, JOHN S. Please write me. Have talked with your mother.—Address Moth Sadoy, 1802 S. 11th St., St. Louis Mo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WALTON, KENNETH. Resident of Brownsville, Texas. Left Tampico for New York. Last heard of from the Bowery. Please write.—Address Bob Rutledge, 1202 Arlington St., Houston, Texas.

GILDAY, JOHN E. Was with me in Utah and Wyoming on the Union Pacific in the Winter of 1917-18. Please write.—Address Edward R. Hanoon, P. O. Box 134, Waterloo, Indiana.

LEWIS, OSCAR. ("Bug.") Returned from Manila June 1917 with Company C, 8th Inf. Your old pal would like to hear from you.—Address Forrest C. Moyle, Co. C. 30th, U. S. Inf., Presidio of San Francisco, Calif.

ZITZMAN, EDDIE and JOE FOLEY. Last heard of in Arverne Park, near Troy, New York. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Edwin J. Ryan, care of *Adventure.*

MEADOWS, MADGE (or Marguerite Munro). Last heard of in Mexico at Monterey, or Chihuahua City, Mexico. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. Loraine Cocking, 1431½ D St., Sacramento, Calif.

WOULD like to hear from comrades who served in Troop B. 12th Cavalry, from 1901 to 1903—Address David A. Epperhart, R. R. 3, Box 196, San Diego, Calif.

DADDY. We want to hear from you. Please write to us.—Diana and Jackie boy.

WOOD, THEODORE. Your old pal would like to hear from you.—Address Walter Schluter, 315 Summit Ave., West Hoboken, N. J.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

GREENE, CECIL. (brother) Please write. I am ill.—Address Mrs. MacDonald, 3333 Eoff St., Wheeling, West Va.

MACDONALD, MALCOLM. Please write. I am ill and babies need you.—Address Mrs. Macdonald, 3333 Eoff St., Wheeling, West Va.

GRANT, L. S. Last heard of in Houston, Texas, about two months ago. Come home. Your mother not expected to live.—Address J. M. James, Abbeville, S. C.

LEUZKEE, GOTTLIEB FRITZ. Left Detroit, Michigan, about 31 years ago. Last heard of was down South. Please write.—Address Herman Leuzkee, 2318 Faber Ave., Hamtramck, Mich.

WALSH, MATTHEW J. Last heard of was at Sulphur Bank, Lake County, Calif., at the Quicksilver Mines in 1877. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Charles Bell Emerson, Los Gatos, Calif.

"LEARY," "Dutch," Rhyne, Kirck, "Tug" Wilson, Haines, and all the rest of the gang who graduated from U. S. Navy Yeoman School, Newport, Rhode Island on Dec. 23, 1916. Please get in touch. Some of us want to arrange a reunion.—Address C. D. MacGillivray, 87 Orchard St., Somerville, Mass.

HENNESSY, J. M. Gun-captain U. S. S., *Minneapolis* and *Manchuria* during 1918. At that time was living in Jersey City, N. J. Any body knowing his whereabouts kindly communicate with his former shipmate.—Address Charles P. J. Molloy, 1236 Leopard St., Phila., Pa.

RODGERS, (ROGOTZKY) THEODORE. Last heard of about eighteen years ago. Came to New York from Russia thirty years ago. Five feet eleven inches, dark complexion, dark hair, and wore a mustache. Musician; taught in a New York Music School. Any information will be appreciated by his brothers.—Address W. T. Rodgers, 1021 Hillman St., Baltimore, Md.

FRAZER, JOHN GEORGE. Left home Aug. 29, 1922. Age thirty years, height five feet, 7 inches, blue eyes, brown hair, scar on right cheek-bone near temple. Any information will be appreciated.—Adress Mrs. J. C. Frazer, 421 Clinton St., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

BERRY, C. R. Your old friend would like to hear from you. Please write.—Address Harry Thomas, Camp, Valsetz, Oregon.

LEVINE, DAVE. World War Veteran. Corporal, Company C, 328th Infantry. About five feet four inches tall, weighing about 140 lbs. Dark brown, curly hair. Believed to be in the West. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 449, care of *Adventure*.

KRONE, JOSEPH. Left home Dec. 6, 1921. Age eighteen years, height five feet seven inches, slight build, dark brown hair, gray eyes and pale complexion. Any information will be appreciated.—Address SAMUEL KRONE, 715 Jackson Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

ADAIR. Left his home Oelwein, Iowa, Aug. 19, 1922. Age twenty-one, About five feet six inches; blue eyes, brown curly hair; wore checkered suit, and was a good boxer. Had tattoo of crucifixion on left arm near wrist. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MISS VIOLA ADAIR, 23 N. 2nd St., Oelwein, Iowa.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

SGT. PAT VAUGHN. Overseas Co. H. 129 Inf. Captain Baker, Commander Co. H. 129 Inf. Or any member of Convalescent Camp No. 2, or any member of Base Hospitals 16-66-17-18, between Sept. and Nov. 1918. Please write.—Address F. E. COOPER, 817 Myrtle Ave., El Paso, Texas.

WILLIAMS, MISS. Red Cross nurse and research worker. Member of Base 18 at Buzollies, France. Any information will be appreciated.—Address F. E. COOPER, 817 Myrtle Ave., El Paso, Texas.

HERRINGTON, ERNEST CHESTER, Joseph Forest; Roy Ray, and Philip Maitland. Any information will be greatly appreciated by their sister.—Address MRS. RUBY M. FAIRCHILD, General Delivery, Eureka, Calif.

SMITH, BERTHA CHRISTINA. (*née* Grant.) Any information will be appreciated by her mother and sister.—Address MRS. RUBY M. FAIRCHILD, General Delivery, Eureka, Calif.

NEKRING, FREDERICK. Age seventy years. Born near the city of Pyriz in the Province of Pommern, Germany. Came to U. S. and supposed to have taken up a homestead either in Mississippi or Missouri. Married girl by the name of Kittzing. Had three children—Matilda, Ernest and Herman. Any information will be appreciated.—Address KARL H. NEKRING, 327 Marshall St., Elizabeth, N. J.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Dec. 10th or Dec. 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ACRES, BERT.; Barnard, Ella; Bailey, Jack W.; Bradley, George Shifler or Joseph Lake; Bush, Henry; Davis, Aron and family; Dempsey, Ray; Dow, Edmund F.; Estes, Bill Adams; Fausler, J. P. (Clarence); Foster, Donald A.; Foster, H. B. (Hal); Franklin, B. G. (or Guy); Garcia, Julian (Joe); Wing, James; Hunter, Guy; Harding, Samuel Merton; Heaton, Maurice, Howard, George; Johnson, Nellie; Kahl, Harry; Keim, Albert; Kerkling, Herbert E.; Layton, Clyde; MacDonald, James F.; Madsen, Louis; Magee, Alfred H. ("Red"); McDevitt, Hugh; McManus, Roderick P.; Newman; Albert E.; O'Brien, John; Payne, Alfred; Pilsbury, Mary; Reiner, Harold; Sammet, Jacob; Sargent, John W.; Scotts, Cecil; Seril, Frank; Shahane, T. C.; Sjoberg, Alex.; Smigoski, John M.; Spaulding, Joseph C.; Stotts, Cecil, Clarence and Charley; Taylor, Milton James; Vivian, Howard, Wall, Frank or any other member of 22nd Co. from 1898 to 1903; Williams, Earl; Williams, Rufus.

MISCELLANEOUS:—My old chums of the Clover Leaf Club; U. S. S. *Truxtun's* Crew, 1911; Kirby, James; Eugene, W. T.; Frye, Crawford, Pete or anyone who knew "Daddy" Lantz in 1911-12.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

ATKINS, E. S. S., Jr.; Allen, Mable, Mrs.; Bayless, Dorothy; Banks, Jimmie; Breath, Hastlar Gal.; Bennett, Thomas T.; Brady, Patrick; Blum, N. A.; Buchanan, James; Crafts, H. A.; Chrishlom, Byron; Cardie, Sinn; Caney, Jack; Cuttriss, C. A.; Cortelli, Fatima; Crafts, L. S.; Curris, Mildred; Colwell, L. Margaret Miss; Edwards, Henry A.; Emerson, F. S.; Gilfillan, Ruth; Gaylord, Alfred; Gene, Frenchie; Gormley, W.; Happy, H.; Hungerford, G. E.; Hilles, Lieut. Wm.; Holston, S. C.; Huntington, C. H.; Hurst, Freda; King, J. D.; Kelly, D.; Kimsey, R. W.; King, Homer B.; Kahele, Edward Augustine; Lynch, W.; Livingston, J. K.; La Glaire, Peter; Loeck, A. J.; Marilee, Nelson; Matter, James K.; Miths, B. Radke; Moran, Edward J.; Mosse, James; MacIllrath, W. R.; Murphy, Elizabeth; Madison, Artell; McCravey, E. L.; Mennet, Geo.; Major, Max D.; Merritt, Florence; Noble, George; O'Farrel, Patrick; Pierce, Samuel S.; Perry, James; Paterson, Robert G.; Paradis, A. B.; Patten, Lewis E.; Polow, David; Presler, Phil; Rhodes, Carrie L.; Roe, Charles; Robinson, Jack P.; Robertson, Mrs. Chester; Stillons, George; Schmidt, Alex. R.; Sprague, T. R.; Smalley, Jack G.; Singley, Anton; Saidmore, John C.; Trekell, Mrs. Cynthia; Todd, Homer Eps.; Warner, J. E.; Weston, Edward; Wittell, Chester; Wilman, Cynthia; Webber, E. C.;

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JANUARY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novel mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE TEXANS *Frederick R. Bechdolt*
The fightingest strain of the Old West.

THE KHAN'S GIFT *J. D. Newsom*
—goes to the loyal man.

NO AMBITION, NO HUMOR, NO FEELIN'S *John Joseph*
The unexpected answer of an old-timer to a bandit raid.

CAT-O'-MOUNTAIN A Four-Part Story Part II *Arthur O. Friel*
Douglas Hampton decides to try a haunted house.

ONE OF LIFE'S GUARDIANS *Clyde B. Hough*
Raccoon tactics.

CHEATING FATE *Herman Peterson*
Two men in a sinking boat.

BY THE GRACE OF ALLAH *George E. Holt*
Mohamed Ali with a price on his head.

DENNY *Frank C. Robertson*
Sheep-dog loyalty.

THE LURE *Bill Adams*
A tavern night in Sailortown ere the *Silverwing* put to sea on the morning tide.